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Race, Resistance and Rap Music

by

Stuart Malinowski

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Education**

in

The Sociology of Education

Department of Educational Foundations

Edmonton, Alberta

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To David Cox: stay true and "keep the fresh beats coming".

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore the relationship between Black youth and rap music. In particular, the study examined whether rap fans were perceiving and/or using rap as a form of resistance. The study also recorded their attitude toward some of the most controversial themes in rap as indentified in the literature, namely profanity, violence, misogyny, religion and drugs.

The participants consisted of sixteen Black Canadian youths, nine males and seven females, ranging in age from fifteen to nineteen. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. During an interview, I played and/or referred to a selection of message conscious rap and then investigated the nature and degree to which the participants listened to, comprehended and related the music to their everyday lives.

The findings suggest that they do relate to the music as a form of resistance. However, this relationship is not absolute nor complete. On the one hand, they appear to be drawing a great deal of pride, collective energy and critical awareness from the music. On the other hand, an underlying sense of alienation seems to prevent them from translating this awareness into any meaningful transformative action. Moreover, many participants criticize their peers for failing to penetrate beneath the surface of stylistic imitation. However, the findings do leave room for speculation that with time and the appropriate critical education, disaffected youth may emerge as viable agents of social change.

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Chapter I

Introduction

> "Since the ruling power tries to impose silence by presenting an undebatable word, the receiver must present the most debatable symbol."
> (Assante, 1987: 31)

The intention of this study is to determine whether Black youths actually perceive and/or use rap music as a form of resistance. The group for the study has nine males and seven females, ranging in age from fifteen to nineteen. Data were collected using semi-structured audiotaped interviews. The students[1] were interviewed either individually or in small groups of two or three. During an interview, I played and/or referred to a selection of message conscious rap and then investigated the nature and degree to which the group listened to, comprehended and related the music to their everyday lives.

Powell defines rap music as "street poetry with a funk beat."(1991: 246) Samuels refers to it as "theatrical Black nationalism."(1991: 26) DeMott describes rap as "sonic bad attitude, ie., a ghetto ideology which reflects the young Black man's defiant refusal to play the 'game' he can never win."(1988: 48) Rap music typically subordinates melody to rhythm texture and impact. Its three major musical influences are the Griots(traditional African minstrel storytellers), Black American music(ie., blues, jazz, etc.) and various street-level verbal practices such as 'sounding' and 'playing the dozens'. All three influences draw on various types of verbal virtuosity central to Black urban culture, such as the use of satirical asides, proverbs, jokes, praise and ridicule. Many critics charge that rap lacks aesthetic value, and exalts and exacerbates Black stereotypes and morally destructive behaviour. Proponents would argue rap, with its inherent emphasis on Black pride, unity and critical autonomy, serves as a positive source of regenerative power for marginalized Black youth. They also would contend that rap's inherent openness, resilience and hybridity mark it as a legitimate post modern art form. In short, rap embodies Black urban experience and musical traditions. Its rich often ambiguous symbolism, base-booming energy and defiantly biting language incites both praise and condemnation.

---

[1] I refer to the participants in this thesis as either 'student(s)' or 'group', depending on context.

Resistance theory takes social transformation as its guiding interest. It operates from the premise that domination is neither unidimensional nor ever complete. Put another way, it assumes oppressed groups do not always passively submit to structural forces of domination. Instead, they may actually 'produce' forms of opposition that unwittingly contribute to their oppression. Or, more encouraging, the notion of resistance posits that oppressed groups sometimes engage in modes of expression and behaviour that subvert, resist and/or transcend the logic of domination. That is to say, there are moments when the oppressed offer a critique of how various means(ie., social, cultural and economic) reproduce dominant interests while simultaneously advancing an alternate world view, one that reflects their interests and history. Giroux informs us that it is in these moments of critique and creative alternate visions that the fleeting images of freedom are to be found.(108) For they represent the first step in a "radicalization of consciousness and the reconstruction of social relations that materially reinforce the logic of emancipatory interests."(151) Thus resistance theory celebrates a dialectical notion of human agency by striving to illuminate the complex ways in which subjectivity informs both reproduction and transformative possibility.

In many ways rap music functions as an oppositional theory that parallels resistance theory.(Stephens, 1991:71) Like resistance theory, rap music gears toward a marginalized following. Like resistance theory, rap music, particularly the political style, grounds itself in a dialectic of self-critical empowerment and raising social awareness for the purposes of collective transformation. Like resistance theory, political rap assumes that people want or feel the need to change their social reality. And like resistance theory, rap music is conceptually radical. That is, its militant pro-Black posturing and iconoclastic thematizing of ghetto experience represent a threatening siren to complacent middle class sensibilities. (Schusterman, 1991: 613) In short, rap music, much like resistance theory, "suggests a mode of inquiry that allows the oppressed to speak; ie., it provides a theoretical framework that gives a subordinant group a privileged opportunity to display how it produces and reproduces itself within the dominant society."(Giroux, 1983: 127)

There are several reasons for doing a study on rap music. As mentioned above, one reason is that rap music's inherently oppositional nature makes it an ideal test for resistance. A second reason is that the enduring controversy and contradictions surrounding rap makes it a fascinating and worthwhile topic of study. Thirdly, despite all of the controversy, the subject of rap still lacks scholarly attention. Moreover, in the literature that has dealt with these various charges for and against rap, one group has remained severely under-represented: the young people who actually listen to the music. Why do they listen to rap? What do they think about the profanity and violence in rap? Do they perceive political rap as a political rap as a legitimate vehicle for raising Black awareness and action? It seems to me that their perspective is what matters most in terms of moving toward an integrated understanding of the rap phenomenon. Fourthly, as we will see in chapter three, the literature reveals that resistance theory fails to adequately theorize the relationship between resistance and race and gender. Thus, by focussing on Black youth, both male and female, this study represents a modest move toward reconciling this imbalance.

Finally, it is important to remember that this study is not to be interpreted as the quintessential text on rap. Rather, it should be approached as one small stepping stone in the struggle to foster greater understanding of youth and their orientation toward the rap phenomenon. It is my hope that the study's insights, implications and shortcomings will help illuminate the direction that future research should take.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis has six chapters. The study's theoretical framework follows the introduction. It broadly covers the central tenets and assumptions of resistance theory as developed by one of its leading advocates, Henry Giroux. At the conclusion of this chapter is my primary research question.

The third chapter, the literature review, consists of three sections. The first section has the growing body of literature on resistance theory. Included is an account of the strengths and limitations of the theory also a description of the findings from major empirical studies. In the second section I look at the popular periodical reviews of rap music. The central emphasis is on the differing opinions and arguments for and against rap music, especially how various writers have perceived issues of misogyny, violence, and the radical potential of hard core, etc.. Finally, I consider some of the scholarly works done on the sociology of music in general and rap music in particular. I concentrate on the literature's empirical treatment of the controversial relationship between music and causal behaviour, and rap's role in Black cultural politics.

The fourth chapter is a description of my methodology. I explain my methodological framework, discuss problems and shortcomings of the procedures and include a group profile. Regarding the lyrics used in the study, I originally intended to have a chapter dealing specifically with a content analysis of the songs. However, an extensive content analysis is beyond the time and scope of the study. Instead, observations and insights into the lyrics will appear throughout the analysis. A sample of the lyrics appears in appendix one.

The fifth chapter is the section on findings. It has two major sections. First, the 'domains of controversy' address the major issues of public controversy surrounding rap. There are five domains in total: namely, profanity, violence, the treatment of women, religion and drugs. Second, the 'domains of resistance' attend to the primary research question concerning resistance. There are three domains in all: namely, rap and general disposition, rap and Black self concept, and rap and Black social awareness.

The final chapter deals with my discussion of the findings. I analyze the study's major themes within a context that further informs both our understanding of rap music and the concept of resistance. I also identify major shortcomings of this study, and offer recommendations for future research in the area of rap music and youth cultures.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

This chapter addresses the major assumptions and key concepts of resistance theory as developed and advanced by one of its leading architects, Henry Giroux.

Much of Giroux's work begins with criticisms of current theory. There are three main theoretical schools that he challenges. Common to all three schools is the desire to explain how society functions and/or reproduces itself.

The first school is conservativism, also known as structural functionalism. Its major expressions are found in Durkheim(1961), Merton(1957) and Parsons(1951). This tradition has two distinguishing characteristics. First, it tends to portray society as a bastion of cheery consensus. That is to say, it assumes that people willingly align themselves in congruence with conventional norms and success goals. Thus people merrily march off to work or school in exchange for institutionally prescribed rewards or prizes, usually material in nature. Second, the conservative tradition uses the natural or positive sciences as its model of theoretical development. Positivism assumes that we can understand or measure human behaviour in the same objective, neutral and quantifiable way in which we observe and understand natural phenomena. Put another way, it reduces the motives behind why we do what we do as humans to mathematical laws or a numerical blueprint. Thus to understand human behaviour one merely has to read or discover the blueprint through quantitatively-framed observation and description.

Giroux dismisses this approach on two fronts. First, he maintains that, contrary to the conservative perspective, conflict and alienation characterize the social world, not consensus.(1983: 48-49) Secondly, building on the legacy of the Frankfurt School, Giroux asserts that the theory's underlying logic of positivism serves as an ideological means to reproduce the status quo and existing dominant order.(11-33) He points out that under the guise of objectivity and neutrality, knowledge is situated:

> above and beyond the social realities and relationship of the people who produce and define it. It is fixed and unchanging in the sense that its form, structure and underlying normative assumptions appear to be

> universalized beyond the realm of historical contingency or critical analysis. (178)

In this petrifying light, any notion of transformative action or historical change appears irrelevant or impossible, since everything is predefined according to objective laws. Social ills, such as war, poverty and oppression, therefore acquire a lustre of immutable permanence, as unchanging and unchangeable as the moon or mountains. Moreover, people are not morally inclined to do any thing about these ills because the pretense of neutrality removes them from considering, let alone acting on, any ethical responsibility. Also, the conservative rationality typically reduces knowledge "to the mastery of technique and technology for ends already decided from above."(179) For instance, teachers customarily manage and administer the 'prescribed' curriculum with passive neutrality. They are rarely expected to or externally rewarded for critically knowing the vested interest behind this prescription. Thus, "positivism freezes both human beings and history."(15)

It is important to note that Giroux does not totally dismiss the notions of objectivity and neutrality. Rather, he makes an important distinction between 'objectivity', which includes minimizing biases, false beliefs and discriminating behaviours, and 'objectivism', which:

> refers to an orientation that is atemporal and ahistorical in nature. In this orientation, 'fact'' becomes the foundation for all forms of knowledge and values and intentionality lose their political potency by being abstracted from the notion of meaning. (1979: 278)

The second major theory is the interpretive approach, otherwise known as the culturalist tradition. The seminal works of Hoggart(1958), Thompson(1961) and Williams(1973) express the primary tenets of this tradition. Culturalist theory assumes the primacy of human agency in social/class analysis. Central to the culturalist argument for subjectivity is a redefinition of class and conflict. Regarding the first concept, culturalists define class less as relations of power and more as relations of meaning. That is, it treats class as an "interpersonal medium through which people actively define experience and respond to the conditions under which they live."(127) In this context, each class experience has the potential to produce or create its own 'culture'; there is no such thing as only one realm of culture exclusive to a particular class(as in 'high culture'). Regarding the concept of conflict, culturalists do not view the nature of domination as a static, one dimensional imposition of the ruling class. That is to say, meaning and experience are not merely dictated to or shaped by a dominant class. Instead the culturalist perspective argues that "while ruling class determinations establish the constraints and conditions within which subordinate groups respond to, live out and make history, it is a history always marked by horizons that remain open rather than closed."(127) Thus in short, according to the culturalists, people, regardless of social background, "determine or actively make their own history, including its constraints; history does not happen behind their backs."(120)

Giroux praises culturalist theory for trying to reclaim the primacy of subjectivity and meaning in the unfolding of history and social relations.(135) He also commends the theory for politicizing culture by refusing "to reduce the privileges of cultural production, creation and resistance to the realm of high culture."(125) Such articulations mark a theoretical turning-point as far as constructing a theory based on transformative potential. But ultimately he rejects the culturalist approach on several fronts. First, he contends that it over-emphasizes subjectivity. That is, it forgets that powerful determinants, such as work, family and the State, do work 'behind the backs' of human agents shaping their identity and experience. Second, and in a related way, culturalists lack the theoretical tools for understanding the nature and degree to which this determinism occurs. Third, culturalists neglect the fact that classes do involve conflicts over relations of power. In other words, "the crucial question of what classes fight over or what gives one class more power than another is devalued in relation to the value and authenticity of working class experience."(133) Finally, the culturalist tradition usually treats the relation between class and culture as homogenous. In reality a variety of often contradictory lived experiences may constitute a given class. For instance, homosexuality permeates the working class fabric, despite traditional stereotypes of being hyper-masculine.

Radical or structuralist theory is the third major school. Althusser(1971) Bourdieu and Passerson(1977a), Poulantzas(1973) and Bowles and Gintis(1976) have contributed greatly to the development of this tradition. At the core of the structuralist method is a rejection of the primacy of the human subject and the importance of consciousness in shaping history. Instead, it argues that various structural determinants, ie. economic, political and ideological, organize society in a way that reproduces the social practices and privileges of the dominant group. For instance, structuralists such as Althusser argue that ideology determines social reality in two ways:

> On the one hand, ideology is both the medium and product of material practices that constitute the famous ideological state apparatus (agencies, which control primarily through consent). On the other hand, individuals not only live in ideology via their participation in the ideological state apparatus, they are also constituted by ideology. (132)

In other words, people participate in various structural fields(or ideological apparatuses) such as State, Church, school, etc. that disseminate a certain ideology, usually the dominant culture's. As a result, people are constantly being bombarded by dominant ideology in their daily functions. Eventually, after years and even generations of contact with these ideological fields, people become or are constituted by this dominant ideology. In this regard, then, people are merely puppets on a string, their actions, tastes and desires shaped and determined from above, so to speak. Thus, contrary to the culturalist tradition, structuralist theory assumes that consciousness is an effect not a cause.

Giroux commends radical theory for politicizing the notion of culture and offering a comprehensive critique of the ruling elite's internal political logic and agenda. However, in the last instance, he rejects the structuralist approach "for being too static, mechanistic and one-dimensional."(138) Whereas the culturalists fail because they overtheorize the agency and experience, the structuralists fail because they go too far in terms of structure. That is, structuralism relies too much on a critique of how ideology and power function as forms of domination within institutional and structural phenomena. In the structuralist view, people are simply passive participants in life. The notion that these same structures may generate resistance, struggle and contestation is lost from this perspective.(136) Thus by undertheorizing the 'active' element of subjectivity, structural theory ironically perpetuates the legitimacy of structural forms of domination and reproduction.

Giroux's response to the above critiques is in providing an alternate theory, one that incorporates or splices the strengths while moving beyond the limitations of these other approaches.

Giroux grounds the notion of resistance in critical theory and neo-Marxist thought. At the very core of resistance theory is a guiding interest in social transformation. What sustains this interest is

Giroux's attempt to "bridge the agency-structure dualism by dialectically reworking the notions of culture, ideology and power within a problematic that takes seriously the notions of agency, critique and struggle."(139) It is to an exploration of this problematic that I now turn, starting with his notion of culture.

Giroux defines culture as an "ensemble of institutions, beliefs, material practices and social relations of a given society."(163) But one culture does not comprise a society. Instead, an aggregate of dominant and subordinant cultures characterizes our social reality. Giroux explains that subordinate cultures are "forged, reproduced and resisted under conditions of power and dependency that primarily, but never totally, serve the dominant culture."(163) In other words, culture does not collapse into a one-sided terrain of domination nor human agency. Rather, it is characterized by a dialectical relationship between the two. Typically then, subordinate culture constitutes a range of experiences both similar to and quite different from those experienced by ruling class groups. (164) Thus the distinction between dominant and subordinate cultures is crucial to the theory of resistance. It provides legitimacy and relevance to the notions of struggle and transformation. For what or whom is there to resist and transform if society is characterized by a cultural logic of sameness? Of course, Giroux's notion of culture assumes that subordinate groups perceive their experience and relationship with the dominant culture in the same problematic light as he does.

Giroux's definition of ideology has a dialectically active quality to it. Like the structuralists, he, too, claims that:

> Ideology is something we all participate in. It is both medium and outcome of lived experience. (145)

But unlike the structuralists Giroux contends that ideology can either serve domination or liberation:

> Yet we rarely understand either the historical constraints that produce and limit the nature of that participation, or what the possibilities are for going beyond existing parameters of action to be able to think and act toward a qualitatively better existence. (145)

Since he assumes that people lack understanding of the way ideology works, both as a means to enable and/or limit action, Giroux develops a notion of ideology critique. This critique has two major cornerstones: (1) a language of critique and (2) a language of possibility. The language of critique centers on a critical analysis of the objective and subjective forces of domination, that is, it exposes their locations and functions, or operational fields; the language of possibility simultaneously reveals the transformative potential of alternative modes of discourse and social relations rooted in emancipatory interests.(144)

In terms of objective domination, a language of critique maintains that the dominant group does not use physical force to advance and preserve its cultural terrain, at least not in the Western world(although underclass minorities sometimes describe their urban communities as being 'occupied' by police). Nor does this domination come simply through the economic/class sphere. Rather, the dominant group secures power through a combination of both material and ideological forces. Material domination often establishes itself in obvious ways, ie. the use of capital and power, ascribed status, sanctioned violence, etc.. But ideological domination manifests itself in more subtle instruments of symbolic violence known as ideological hegemony, or, as we saw earlier in Althusser, the ideological state apparatus. Such hegemonic instruments coerce subordinate consciousness to conform to ruling class interests. Giroux informs us that symbolic coercion typically works by shaping and winning mass consent through the positing of a certain outlook or ideology as natural and universal.(Giroux, 1983: 196) Examples of ideological hegemony include the 'message' found in the mass culture industry and formal school curriculum. Examples are also located in the myriad of physical configurations and social practices/routines embedded in corporate, familial, and educational structures.

In terms of subjective domination, the language of critique asserts that:

> ideology not only shapes consciousness but also reaches into the depths of personality and reinforces, through the patterns and routines of everyday life, needs that limit the self-free activity of social individuals. (148)

In other words, ideology frequently acts on the sphere of the unconscious and the structure of personal needs and desires, leading people to act against their interest and share in their own oppression. Central to this functioning of subjective domination is Lukacs' notion of reification(Lukacs, 1968). Reification, Giroux informs us, is a "form of unconsciousness in which the historically contingent nature of social relations under capitalism has been forgotten and takes on the appearance of mythic permanence and unchanging reality."(1983,

148) In other words, people unconsciously perceive the social world as stonelike, as always being 'that way'. One important consequence of this taken-for-granted immutability is that it prevents people from trying to actively change something, even when they are aware of some structural contradiction or injustice. Given the subtle petrifying effect of reification and other forms of subjective domination, we can see why Giroux states that "it is imperative that one acknowledges the degree to which historical and objective societal forces leave their imprint upon the psyche itself."(149) However, finding manifestations of this imprint is not easy to do. The 'unconscious' person probably cannot explain why he/she displays a certain logic/behaviour, or the interpretation may be distorted. That is why Giroux stresses that:

> ideology critique as it is applied to the unconscious grounding of human behaviour is ultimately meaningful only if it is explored in relation to consciousness and a critical monitoring of the relationship between consciousness and dominant structures and ideologies. (149)

Thus, as one cornerstone of resistance theory, the language of critique dictates that an individual needs a multi-faceted approach to understand fully structural domination. This approach must consider not just objective but subjective mechanisms of economic, social and cultural reproduction.

Unlike the structuralists, Giroux does not stop at a descriptive critique of hegemonic forms of domination, to do so would mean simply recycling the age-old dualism between agency and structure. Instead, he adds a second cornerstone to his theory, namely the language of possibility. It puts forward the notion that oppressed groups sometimes go beyond the critique stage. As Giroux asserts, "clearly, in the behaviour of subordinate groups there are moments of cultural and creative expression that are informed by a different logic, whether it be existential, religious, or otherwise."(108) Put simply, oppressed groups occasionally proffer a different view or ideology on life. While never clearly specifying what constitutes this alternate life view, Giroux does intimate at some likely characteristics: ie., "needs based on meaningful social relations, community freedom, creative work, and a fully developed aesthetic sensibility."(148) Giroux goes on to say that it is in these modes of behaviour as well as creative acts of resistance that the fleeting images of freedom, hence, of possibility, are to be found. (108) For these radicalizing moments or spaces represent a first step in breaking with the logic and institutions of domination.

Of course, resistance theory does not assume that all oppositional moments constitute or speak to an emancipatory possibility. Often oppositional behaviour can be largely insignificant. Or it may represent something in between, in which case it constitutes resistance within accommodation. Giroux informs us that this type of intermediate opposition typically plays itself out in matters of style and symbolic rebellion that lack awareness of its own resistance. (1983:152) Or oppositional behaviour can signify a more serious degenerative and unredemptive cultural phenomena, such as alienation, apathy, or escapist self-destructiveness/indulgence. In this latter case, one has to consider how domination penetrates the subconscious. Conversely, Giroux informs us that for any act to be truly resistant it must have interest in collective political action and demonstrate a radical consciousness that calls into question deeper socio-economic structural injustices and pathologies.(107-111) Thus, oppositional behaviour is very dynamic; and that which "suppresses social contradictions while simultaneously merging with, rather than challenging the logic of ideological domination, falls not under the category of resistance, but its opposite, ie. reproduction and conformism."(110)

With this distinction in mind, the fundamental challenge to resistance theory is proving empirically that an oppositional group a) demonstrates a critical understanding/awareness of the dominant culture in which they participate; b) calls into question or critically challenges all or particular aspects of this culture; and c) struggles to produce and legitimate a collectively constructed alternate world view.

Giroux informs us that the place to test for resistance is in particular cultural forms, sites, and social practices that subordinate groups frequently enter which helps define and construct their sense of identity, culture and politics. One such space is the important revealing potential of popular culture, especially since it serves as a major source of knowledge and experience for young people. But rather than focusing solely on the ideological aspect of popular culture, resistance theory also strives to understand the relationship between oppositional behaviour, popular culture and the affective. Giroux writes that the idea and experience of pleasure "must [also] be constituted politically because it may represent an important corporeal field of life-affirming possibility."(1989:11) He posits the very social nature of popular culture, particularly as compared to high culture, demonstrates a possible forum for democracy:

> The sociality that structures popular forms may contain the unrealized potentialities and possibilities necessary for more democratic and humane forms of community and collective formation. (12)

In short, human struggle and social transformation are the guiding interests of resistance theory. It strives to serve this interest by dialectically linking notions of agency and structure within a context that portrays the processes of domination and resistance as neither static nor complete. That is, resistance theory assumes that both culture and power are multi-dimensional and problematic; and therefore moments exist when subordinate cultures not only submit to but also question or resist the existing dominant social order. Resistance theory reworks the definition of ideology to identify or distinguish between moments of domination and radical potential. A language of critique and a language of possibility are the cornerstones of this redefiniton. The former explores the objective and subjective forms of domination; while the latter addresses those cultural forms and practices that may point to radical alternatives to the existing capitalist hegemonic order. Finally, it is important to bear in mind that ideology operates or works through all levels of individual and group experience: ie., sphere of the conscious, the unconscious, the popular domain(ie the affective), and the realm of common sense.

Considering the fact that resistance theory assigns a primacy to the reading of cultural forms and the notion of the popular, one can see why rap music represents an ideal test for resistance. Not only does rap function in many ways as an oppositional theory, as we saw in chapter one, it is also a potent pop cultural expression. Rap is all about beat and rhythm and getting people to 'move under one groove'. Moreover, fans tend to demonstrate a tremendous affective investment in the music.

With the theory's primary concepts and assumptions freshly in mind, we can now return to the primary research question that is to guide our empirical inquiry into the theory. That is, **do Black youth perceive and/or use rap music as a form of resistance?**

Chapter III

Literature Review

This chapter consists of three constitutive sections. The first section addresses the scholarly work done on resistance theory. A discussion of the popular material on rap music follows, with a particular emphasis on articles dealing with rap and issues of misogyny, violence and militancy. The third section looks at scholarly studies done on the sociology of music in general and rap music in particular.

The range and depth of literature on resistance theory is limited. Nash points out that this is because resistance is still in its embryonic stage of development.(1984-85: 19-31) Yet despite being relatively new, the theory has already drawn a tremendous amount of both praise and criticism. With this in mind, I have presented primarily a collection of dialogues between prominent scholars that I feel best reflect the major issues surrounding resistance theory. It is important to point out that much of what follows deals with resistance in relationship to youth cultures, schooling and the dominant society. The reason for this is threefold. One, as was just mentioned, the treatment of resistance is still somewhat limited. Two, Giroux grounds much of his theory of resistance within the schooling experience. Three, my interests and professional background are in education as are most of the intended readers of this thesis.

Hall and Jefferson mark the first major analysis of resistance.(1975) It is a collection of theoretical essays that address the topic of subcultures and resistance. The book's main thesis asserts that the relations between dominant and subordinate cultures are always intensely active.(DeMott, 1988: 51) This position of course contrasts sharply with the structural Marxist argument (Bourdieu and Passerson,1977a, Bowles and Gintis,1976) that individuals are mere passive bearers of dominant ideology. To demonstrate the dialectical activity between subordinate and dominate groups, Hall and Jefferson focus on a reading of the meaning of subcultural styles, particularly "how the making of these styles involves the...appropriation and investment of particular dominant symbols, objects with authentic subcultural meanings and resonances."(54) The authors posit this symbolic manipulation, or "trafficking in illegal symbols", as McLaren(1985:89) calls it, helps subcultures win space and legitimacy.

In his ethnographic case study of resistance in working class males in England(1977), Paul Willis provides empirical evidence supporting Hall and Jefferson's thesis. Willis explores why working class boys get working class jobs. He suggests that the 'lads' develop an "ideology of resistance"(109-110) to formal schooling as a result of their growing up in the broader working class culture. In working class culture, the "anti-school peer group encourages the lads to develop a counter-school culture, one that derides book learning, contemptuously dismisses white collar jobs and celebrates the masculine culture of manual labour."(53) Willis argues that it is this self-formation aspect of resistance to mental labour that is the key to understanding how resistance in schooling contributes to both reproduction and potential transformation. For on the one hand, because power and social mobility are connected to intellectual work, the lads' preference for masculine work only serves to implicate them further in their own domination. However, on the other hand, because this resistance is the manifestation of their own cultural values, styles, rituals, etc., "the lads do not experience this preparation as oppression, but as freedom, autonomy and independence."(Tanner, 1990: 76)

Many advocates of resistance praise Willis' substantive empirical contribution to both resistance theory and theories of reproduction. McLaren asserts that the discovery that students of resistance not only win space but also often implicate themselves even further in their own domination is a considerable advance in understanding education's role in social reproduction.(1985) Arnot and Whitty(1982), Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) and Shamal(1990) all remark that Willis' attempt to link structure human agency dialectically is a significant gain for resistance theory.

However, in his study of high school drop-outs, Julian Tanner presents data that appear to contradict Willis' conclusions regarding the pervasive role of resistance in school.(1990) Tanner's study takes on Willis' concern with this dialectical process of structure and human agency, and attempts to identify why and how some youth drop out. Based on the data, Tanner does not find any evidence that his respondents are "engaged in any well defined cultural repudiation or class resistance."(82) In other words, little if any human agency is discernible. In fact, quite the opposite is found. The respondents fail to express any eagerness to invert the "prevailing mental/manual hierarchy or cut ties with the dominant economic order and conventional success goals."(82) Tanner adds that "it would be an exaggeration to claim that the respondents discordant sentiments have the hallmark qualities of an alternative value system opposed to the one sponsored by the school."(82) Yet, this conscious penetration of structural inequalities is central to the definition of resistance. Thus, in short, Tanner's study suggests that the amount of resistance to schooling is overstated.

James Walker(1985) draws similar conclusions to that of Tanner. He claims that Willis over-romanticizes working class resistance to schooling largely because of his uncritical attitude toward the 'lads'. He cites several examples of this uncritical treatment. For instance, he points out that Willis regards one lad, Joey, as an "able exponent of the assumptions and opinions of the counter-school culture, rather than an individual with unrepresented views."(67) However, Walker argues that "neither Willis nor Joey provide any evidence of this incredible penetrative insight that is central to the definition of resistance."(67) Still further, Willis neglects to question many of the lads basic assumptions. For example, Willis accepts Joey's accounts of the 'ear'oles' jealousy for the lads lifestyle without ever asking the former themselves. Moreover, Walker criticizes Willis for failing to consider the ear'oles behaviour as a possible mode of resistance. Walker insightfully explains:

> It is quite possible to compromise. . . after all, people may accept authority short term to acquire knowledge and skills for quite non-conformist long term use. This point sheds quite a different light on the ear'oles practices Willis analyzes as "conformist".(76)

Hammerslay and Atkinson(1983) suggest that this shutting out of other perspectives is not only due to Willis' theoretical rigidity, but also his overrapport with the lads. They contend that this 'one of the boys' aspect of his work leaves Willis without the means of practical criticism of lad culture.

McRobbie(1978) argues that this same uncritical overrapport also prevents Willis from considering the powerful way in which the lads' sexist attitudes function to reproduce cultural and social inequalities. Interestingly, Willis' work is what inspired McRobbie to examine resistance among adolescent females. She concludes that "what may look like feminine rejection of the school's sexual ideology is actually, upon closer scrutiny, nothing less than a splendid display of capitalist hegemony of the worst kind."(Walker, 1985: 48)

Thus a number of studies appear to undermine Willis' findings. They generally contend that his work suffers from dogmatic inductivism and methodological carelessness.

In response to such criticism, Willis wrote an illuminating article with the intent to, in his words, "recover the intellectual project of the book."(1981: 62) Throughout the article Willis stresses that the distinctiveness of the book is not in its analysis of reproduction but rather its emphasis on the moment of production. His guiding interest is to uncover the underlying "autonomous productive forms of lad culture which may or may not become the reproductive elements of sexism, racism and anti-intellectualism."(62) These reproductive elements, Willis insists, are "merely a portion of the results of this production". . . and do not, "in reverse, specify the nature of the former, which in certain essentials, remains free, wide in range and scope and includes much not imagined in social reproduction."(66)

On the allegation of reductionism, Willis admits that the book did not:

> look sufficiently on the family or note the possibility that 'shared' structures of masculinity(between himself and the lads) may have made the research possible and that such structures underlying the ethnography could make reading the book an oppressive experience for woman. (67)

However, he believes that the book as a whole should not be accused of assuming passivity and ignorance of these groups. "One chooses a main focus", he states, "which is quite different from excluding fundamental concerns from any particular main focus."(62) Furthermore, he grants that the theoretical and intellectual basis behind the book focuses on class domination, but suggests that "it is applicable, mutatis mutandis, to other forms: gender, race."(63) All major forms of domination are "squeezed" into any given social situation. Consequently, the articulation of one form inevitably informs the others. This, he charges, is "a very ethnographic fact."(63). Willis' concludes the article by stating that he should not be criticized for omitting these different variables; rather his book should be applauded for instigating or pointing to the need for future study of other groups.(66)

Willis' work on resistance has undoubtedly attracted tremendous scholarly criticism over the years; however, more and more attention is being directed at the work of Giroux. McNeil(1981), for instance, critically addresses, first, his idealistic nebulism and, second, the lack on Giroux's part to identify the source of teachers' willingness to challenge social inequalities in their classroom.

With respect to her first criticism, McNeil admonishes Giroux for "using a number of progressive terms or slogans interchangeably such as 'better society' and 'democratic discourse' without elaborating on neither."(205) The obvious danger in this, she argues, is that "such slogans do not imply the same process, nor the same outcome, for all individuals/groups."(205)

Regarding her second criticism, McNeil "cannot understand how Giroux could, on the one hand, paint such a convincing picture of the contemporary educational bureaucracy, with its all-encompassing positivism, reproductive mechanisms and control, and then, on the other, turn around and posit a model of emancipatory education that begins with teachers."(201) McNeil asks Giroux:

> By what means does he envision emancipating teachers from their present participation in the highly bureau-technocratic system of schooling today? Are present teachers to come to new awareness on their own? If so, would this be done individually or collectively? If not, are they to gain new insights from outside experts like Professor Giroux? Are emancipatory colleges of education to train a new generation of more politically sophisticated teachers to replace current technocratic ones? (206)

Put simply, McNeil believes that the bureaucratic obstacles are just too big to overcome. Both authority and efficiency are, in the words of the many teachers she interviewed, the "only keys to their own survival in the absence of administrative support for alternative educative purposes."(206) Therefore, she concludes that is highly unlikely that teachers could function effectively as a source of radical pedagogy. McNeil ends her article by proclaiming that Giroux would have recognized this had he rooted his work in the empirical realities of schooling.

In his reply to McNeil(aptly titled, "Pedagogy, Pessimism, and the Politics of Conformity", Giroux lashes back that:

> inherent in McNeil's analysis is a distrust of the power of theory, a one-sided view of human consciousness, and a lack of faith in the power of

> people to reflect on and change the oppressive circumstances in which they find themselves. Her perspective represents a new form of authoritarianism, one that abolishes the subject and the need for political engagement.(1981: 215)

In the article, Giroux proceeds to provide several counter-arguments. First, while he admits that "the homogeneity of the answers she received from teachers interviewed is indeed disturbing", Giroux goes on to argue that "the generalizations that flow from her empirical research and analysis move from being disturbing to simply improbable."(213) For instance, he does not believe that schools nationally share the same degree of teacher powerlessness, technocratic rationality, authoritarianism or control. Willis reinforces this claim when he states that insofar as schools are sites of cultural production, different organizations can well have different effects, especially in their degrees of repression and.or isolation of subordinate forms of cultural production.(1981: 61)

Second, Giroux contends that teachers may be oppressed not because of the all-encompassing power of the school bureaucracy, but because they:

> may not be aware of the nature of their own alienation, or may not recognize the problem as such. The first step, then, in attempting to fight against the forces of domination and constraint rests in recognizing them.(218)

In other words, teachers may not have the critical tools to question the assumptions and logic that underlie such a bureaucracy. Freire refers to this raising of structural awareness as"conscientization". (1985) Giroux adds that critical thinking among teachers can be developed in the very places and through the very practices that McNeil flippantly dismisses, ie., radical curriculum and teaching strategies, in-service programs, etc..(1981: 219)

Third, Giroux addresses McNeil's assertion that the call for emancipation is meaningless without a blueprint outlining what a "more democratic" society would look like. Giroux points out that he never intended to provide such a "blueprint", nor does he believe it is a theoretically and ethically defensible position.(219) He informs us that "it is important not to forget that one important moment of liberation rests with the oppressed defining for themselves their vision of a more just society, a vision that is shaped in the nature of the struggle, practice and historical circumstances."(219)

Despite cogent arguments such as the one offered by Giroux, the concept of social transformation remains one of the principal problematics of resistance theory, and therefore a popular target of critics. In what follows, Conservative social theorist Andy Hargreaves and neo-Marxist Roy Nash critique this main theoretical claim of resistance theory. Both writers draw on Jean Anyon's empirical research to advance their arguments.

Hargreaves main thesis is that resistance theory's political commitment to social change is, "in practice, fundamentally in conflict with theoretical openness and empirical rigour. . . and has been responsible for a number of fundamental inaccuracies in theories of resistance."(1982:107)

Hargreaves identifies several problems within both the theory itself and and related empirical work to support his thesis. In terms of the theory, he argues that "in the work of Apple and Giroux one finds that this deep commitment to social change has not only compelled them to revise their theory, i.e., from structuralist to dialectical, but has also led them to ignore a sizeable amount of research(especially non-Marxist) that would make their case for resistance more seriously problematic."(110) Hargreaves asserts that while all research may serve some ideological interest, "this does not mean one should go "actively" seeking examples of resistance at the expense of ignoring other pertinent evidence."(111) He cites their over-sympathetic and over-indulgent treatment of Willis' ethnographic work as an example of this alleged theoretical rigidity:

> Both Apple and Giroux are less interested in treating Willis' evidence in a critical fashion, than in his general argument about working class resistance, for which the cited evidence supplies a set of conveniently apt examples."(112)

Hargreaves also attacks the theory's inherent disdain of value freedom. In his view, such contempt is completely erroneous:

> There is no necessary reason why value-free explanations of different courses of action need be translated into some kind of politically covert endorsement of a particular group or class. This is not to say that normative concepts such as resistance cannot be included in sociological explanations of schooling-providing they are made explicit; recognized as such and defined in such a way as to be open to test. (122)

Put simply, Hargreaves recommends that theories of resistance need to take on a more pluralistic approach to social/schooling analysis. By pluralistic approach, Hargreaves means a venture that will entail drawing on the conceptual framework and insights of more than one tradition. "A move of this is kind", he proclaims, "would truly be a mark of theoretical openness."(123)

Nash presents a number of counter-arguments in defense of the theory. First, regarding the accusation that resistance suffers from theoretical closure, Nash acknowledges that Hargreaves is somewhat correct. But he adds that it is not by any means, however, an exclusive fault of Marxism to work only within the bounds of a narrowly defined theoretical perspective. Nash writes: "it is normal science for emerging theories such as resistance to prefer to concentrate on the development of their own framework rather than engage in dialogue with rival theories."(1981: 26)

As for Hargreaves remark about value-freedom, Nash asserts that Marxists readily admit that the same rules of evidence and logic apply to their work as to work informed by any other theory of social sciences.(27). That is, although Marxism is open about values for which it stands, this has "no bearing on the fact that Marxist empirical research can be, should be and generally is value free in a *procedural* sense."(27)

Hargreaves also contends that many of the empirical researchers are prone to making similar errors because of their inherent commitment to social change.(1982: 112) Jean Anyon is one such writer. Hargreaves states that "because her work is one of the few major attempts to provide empirical substantiation for theories of reproduction and resistance in schooling, it demands critical scrutiny."(111) It is to this task that I shall now turn.

Anyon has conducted two major empirical studies of reproduction and resistance in school. The first study is a content analysis of several social studies texts.(1978) In this work, she demonstrates how reproduction manifests itself in texts through the omission of certain facts and the sterilization of information. In the second study, Anyon examines the hidden curriculum in five East Coast elementary schools, located in contrasting social class communities.(1980) She found, particularly in the working class schools, that:

> the working class children are developing a potential conflict relationship with capital. . . (They) are not learning to be docile and obedient in the face of present and future degrading conditions or financial exploitation. They are developing abilities and skills of resistance.(88)

Hargreaves strongly doubts the empirical basis on which Anyon rests her claims. He posits that:

> she seems to credit pupil actions with the status of resistance not after carefully scrutinizing the data, but by arbitrary designation. . . Everything and anything that is not absolute and unwilling compliance is considered resistance. . . In effect, what Anyon is being criticized for is using the concept of resistance as a sort of 'trawling device'. (113)

This lack of conceptual precision by Anyon leaves one to ask, what constitutes resistance? As Fernandez points out, "there is an insufficient identification of the spaces that make possible the resistance to social and cultural reproduction, and of the sources and mechanisms that provoke, promote and multiply this resistance."(1988: 170) In other words, what one person may define as resistance, another may view as submission, or or anomie, or conformity. Hargreaves mockingly proclaims, "if daydreaming is defined as a form of resistance, it provides a rather weak platform for collective social transformation."(1982: 120-121) Hargreaves sums up his critique of Anyon and resistance theory this way:

> Of course the place where the definition originates is not in the data at all, but in Anyon's political commitment to social transformation and to search for instances of working class resistance which that commitment engenders. In the end resistance, as evidenced in the work of Giroux and Anyon, is really characterized by theoretical closure and non-interrogative uses of evidence. (121)

Nash agrees with Hargreaves that Anyon does "appear to use the concept of resistance as a trawling device, sweeping the oceans of pupil activity for apt examples."(1982: 27) However, he rejects Hargreaves assertion that the definition of resistance originates in the data. Instead, he claims that "'actors' accounts are not overriding, ie., we must accept that it is not a question of one account or the other, but how all accounts are supported by the same set of actions."(27) In other words, what is important is the ability to designate precise theoretical concepts of resistance before going into the field. To support this claim, Nash points out that

> Anyon finds resistance when she looks for resistance for the same reason Rutter(88) finds delinquency when he looks for delinquency. The only difference being, Rutter is more precise in his declaration of what constitutes delinquency. (27)

Nash concludes his article with a general defense of resistance in particular and Marxism in general. He writes that while the theory is no doubt problematic, "inadequate methodology does not, however, damage the theory of resistance or the theory of Marxism in general."(28)

To sum up this section, the literature on resistance theory suggests a number of limitations in resistance, both theoretically and empirically. First, the theory lacks conceptual rigour. There is no "body of precisely defined concepts available which might give the theory of resistance analytical capacity."(Fernandez, 1988: 171) Consequently, different conceptual frameworks have identified different and often contradictory forms of resistance. Other times, researchers have used the concept of resistance as a "trawling device" to sweep up everything that is not an expression of hegemonic compliance. A second and a related problem is that resistance is empirically malnourished. Third, resistance theory lacks pluralism. That is, there have been an inadequate number of attempts to consider resistance as it relates to issues of race and gender. Therefore, future resistance studies need to focus on such problematics as patriarchy and domination and racial mediating factors of production and reproduction. Fourth, resistance has "misconstrued the political value of overt rebellious behaviour."(Giroux, 1983: 102) And by limiting their analyses to overt expressions, resistance theories have often overlooked "softer" displays of resistance. Finally, a fifth weakness appearing in the literature is the confluence of cultural production and social reproduction. Resistance theory tends to overtheorize reproduction, at the expense of production of subjectivities. Therefore, future studies in resistance need to explore further the role of production and how it interacts with social/cultural reproduction.

Since 1988 rap music has received a deluge of popular media coverage, including such notable periodicals and papers as The Washington Post, NY Times, Newsweek, Rolling Stone, even US News & World Report.

According to Janice Simpson(1990) rap emerged in the mid 70's as a reaction to the blandness of disco and the slickness of rhythm and blues. She explains that disc jockeys in Black dance clubs began mixing songs, manipulating turntables and interjecting their own hard-hitting lyrics to create a harsher, more real street-tough sound. Pareles(1992) comments that the original emphasis on lyrics and basic beats over complex melodies and instrumental arrangement was also due to the fact that many young urban Blacks could simply not afford the equipment, let alone the space or the electricity to power it. Both Pareles(1992) and Jennings(1990) add that rap continues to be the music of urban poverty, made primarily by young, Black males.

A number of writers present a somewhat defensive line on the issue of profanity in rap. Adler, for instance, points out that despite all the 'media hype', offensive messages really comprise a very small percentage of rap releases.(1991: 56)

Gates and Murr(1990) admit that the language is harsh. But they go on to say that "rap reflects the wit, energy and hope of a generation who have contrived to make art out of what little they were given."(1990: 47) They interestingly refer to rap as the "CNN kids never had", ie., their own newstation communicating what is going on out on the streets.(48)

Prominent rap artist, Ice Cube, argues that rap's harsh language and "bad attitude" image are both necessary, for they lend credibility with the tough customers that he aims to entertain and educate."(1992) Another leading rapper, Eazy-E, calls himself a "street historian simply telling it like it is."(1992; 57) He also contends that people who view rap negatively do not understand the culture or climate that it comes from.

Leland(1992) notes that rap music supplies the only commentaries that many youths will listen to. Dyson argues that "what should be outlawed is not so much the rap itself, but rather the obscene socio-economic conditions that produced it."(1991: 23) Pareles adds that "the real crux of the problem is racism: white suburbia simply cannot handle the fact that rap is communicated by a bunch of arrogant, angry-looking young 'niggas' who remain defiantly unassimilated, profane, and disdainful of middle class proprieties."(1992: 23)

Foote and Sawhill(1990) emphasize that rap is all about attitude-as-cultural style. Following Paul Willis' lead, they assert that having a "bad" attitude comes with the territory, it is a product of the underclass phenomenon. Gates and Murr add that the names of some more prolific rap groups, such as Niggas with Attitudes (NWA) and Public Enemy, intend to caricaturize ghetto "bad attitudes" partly to rub white America in its own racism."(1990: 61) Furthermore, Collison(1990) argues that message-conscious rap functions as a contemporary version of the freedom songs of the 1960's, speaking from and to a ghetto consciousness.

Not all the periodicals that I obtained contain a sympathetic or positive account of rap. To be sure, many articles reflect biting criticisms. Moreover, attacks come from not just 'white suburbia' but also writers, politicians and even rap artists themselves.

Muwakkil(1990), for instance, argues that the thematizing of a militant ghetto consciousness is dividing the community along class lines. To support his argument, he points to the increasing number of middle class oriented radio stations disclaiming rap.

Critic and essayist Stanley Crouch calls one rap group, 2 Live Crew, "spiritual cretins and slime. . . whose obscene and virulent music only adds to the problematic attitudes already burgeoning the condition in urban America."(1990: 15) Similarly, Washington Post columnist, Juan Williams, writes that "the issue with rap is the abuse of women, especially women, and the corruption of young blacks' sensibilities, twisting their conceptions of good sex, good relationships and good times."(1990: 15)

Sykes argues that "rap's rekindling of traditional stereotypes, sexploitation and pervasive use of bad English is diminishing the value of collective ethnic victories of the civil rights movement."(1990: 62)

Samuels criticizes rap for reducing anti-racism to a fad and a form of cultural voyeurism: "if you are a suburban white kid and you want to find out what life is like for a teen, you simply buy a record by N.W.A."(1991: 25) Furthermore, he contends that "rap has forfeited whatever claim it may have had to particularity by acquiring a mainstream white audience whose tastes increasingly determine the nature of the form."(26) In a similar vein, Popular rapper, TuPac Shakur, comments that:

> They got the gangsta rap so negative 'cause they lettin' you think that "bitch" shit sells". I don't mind nobody sayin' "bitch", but put something else on the record. . . it seems like they made that shit for white kids. . . Niggas ain't sayin' nothing because they gettin' paid and the one reason they gettin' paid is because the white man can't duplicate it. There is some white kids right now tryin' rap just like NWA and as soon as they get it, they gonna start kicking these niggas out of the studios.-And when I say 'white', I don't just mean the colour of skin-Blacks can be white, too. (Rappages, April 1992, 20)

But of the various attacks against rap, none is more powerful and more incessant than that of the Parents Music Resource Centre(PMRC). A self-described non-profit organization, the PMRC are engaged in a censorship war on popular lyrics that glamorize graphic sex, satanism, violence, drug use, etc.. They argue that teens tend to deeply embrace popular music as a means to define themselves and the world around them. Moreover, the PMRC subscribes to what Hirsch(1971: 376) refers to as a "hypodermic needle" theory. That is, they assume that adolescents listen attentively to music, pay special attention to the lyrics and interpret both the explicit and implicit meanings of their favourite songs. Consequently, popular music functions as a major socialization force shaping teen attitudes and actions.

In short, since 1988 rap music has received increasing coverage in popular periodicals. It appears that insights and opinions on rap music fall into one of two camps. On the one hand, some writers positively view rap as a legitimate and important empowering voice for an otherwise voiceless sector of society. They argue that rap consciously postures itself as being rough as a reaction to racism and complacent middle class propriety. Others appear to defend rap as a symptom of race and class circumstance, ie. a symptom of a society mired in racism and violence. On the other hand, many critics accuse rap of selling out, exacerbating stereotyped racial roles, and promoting violent and morally destructive behaviour.

Part of the problem with conducting a scholarly study on rap is that it is relatively new on the pop cultural scene. Scholars have simply not had the time to subject it to extensive empirical scrutiny. The fact that I found only one study on rap at the time of writing reflects this empirical malnourishment. Without an adequate data base, I thought it necessary to explore studies done in other areas of popular music, especially marginalized genres such as heavy metal. Findings from these studies will better ground and guide my empirical research in rap. A look at the one empirical study plus theoretical work done on rap will follow this investigation.

Empirical studies of other marginal forms of music, largely heavy metal, centre on the issue of whether lyrics cause or simply reflect and affirm existing deviant or pathological attitudes and behaviour.

Several recent studies support the causal argument. For instance, Verden et al. (1988) tests the assertion that explicit lyrics in heavy metal music encourages promiscuity, drug abuse and satanic worship. The researchers first criticize the indictment of the PMRC for being too simplistic. In their view, a person does not simply put on a violent record and then commit an act of violence. It is much more complex process than that. They argue that "the impact heavy metal music has on its listeners cannot be understood without an examination of listener/music relationship within the context of the day to day experiential domain of the listener."(79) Having said that, they nevertheless conclude that there is a decisive connection between delinquency and heavy metal lyrics.

King(1988) explored the attitudes and characteristics of teenagers who like heavy metal music. He examined adolescents in a hospital psychiatric ward and found that 59% of those hospitalized for substance abuse named heavy metal as their favourite type of music, compared to 17% of adolescents hospitalized for other psychiatric disorders.(304)

In a study of popular lyrics in general, Schlattman(1989) tested for lyrical significance, influence and comprehension among high school students of various scholastic settings. Most students indicated that lyrics were important, but only in combination with the sound. This finding corresponds to an earlier study done by Atkin(1973) in which 93% of the respondents reported that they monitor lyrics closely, albeit with the beat. Many students also reported that music had either "quite a bit" or a "great deal" of influence on them. But Schlattman adds that this "influence does not occur automatically through the simple process of passive and unselective absorption of the value messages."(28) In fact, most students reported disagreeing with a song's lyrical content, supporting the notion of active involvement. With respect to comprehension, there is clearly some comprehension of lyrical content of popular songs among the sample. Not surprisingly, students were less likely to interpret correctly more complex lyrics. Moreover, different types of students related to the songs differently. Finally, Schlattman found that, contrary to the fears and concerns of critics such as the PMRC, the sample were not primarily attracted to deviant themes.

Not every study, however, supports the causal argument. Some recent studies point to the absence of lyrical significance and comprehension to support their arguments

Edwards and Singletary(1984), for instance, found that almost half those surveyed in college mass communications classes either had not heard or could not explain the meaning of popular songs related to their course. Their findings are congruent with earlier studies done by Denisloff and Levine(1971) and Hirsch(1972). Meanwhile, both Rosenbaum (1987) and Leming(1987) report that most their respective samples focused on the general sound and not the lyrics. Leming does, however, agree with Schlattman that students are not passive receptors of the value of musical content; and adds that simply recognizing or comprehending the value of content is no guarantee that adolescents will accept or apply that value."(1987: 379) Frith(1987) not only questions the stated impact lyrics have on an audience, he also adds that too many sociological analyses have characteristically focused on the lyrics to the exclusion of the music.

Other recent studies present data that refute the causal argument on the grounds that the music merely reflects or reinforces what already exists at the structural level. That is, economic inequities, social dislocation(especially alienation) and/or mass marketing forces largely determine music and behaviour.

Arnett(1988), for instance, examined the relationship between teen values and heavy metal music. His findings suggest that heavy metal fans demonstrate a special intense enthusiasm and loyalty to their music. However, he concludes that rather than being the cause of recklessness and despair among adolescents, heavy metal music is a reflection of broader societal alienation. That is, hopelessness and cynicism about the state of the world pervade the songs.(93) Moreover, he reports that a negative or angry mood commonly exists before not after playing the music. Interestingly, he adds that "even though the mood of the listener and the lyrics are despairing and angry...ultimately there is something consoling or purgative in the bond listeners feel to others through the music."(96) Grossberg(1986) posits that one reason it is cathartic is because heavy metal grants definition to one's experiences in relationship to an often hostile or alienating framework of social, political and economic events.

Blau(1988) explored the level of social dislocation and alienation in different metropolitan areas based on the supply of elite(ie., chamber/classical) and popular forms of music. Her findings suggest that traditional, elite music is "largely independent of deleterious social conditions and accompanied by low levels of alienation."(p.883)

While, on the other hand, the "supply of popular music, and probably the demand for it:

> tend to flourish in metropolitan places where economic conditions are poor and where there are large disparities between rich and poor.and that the music may provide and outlet for economic problems. Moreover, while violent crime is spuriously related to popular music, alienation does appear to be a major social circumstance of commercial popular music. (894)

Tanner(1975) examined the inverse relationship between school commitment and two patterns of 'youth culture', namely delinquency and pop music, along class and gender lines. Largely replicating an earlier study, he hypothesized that:

> working class students, particularly males, with a low commitment to school will orient themselves toward street culture to articulate their disengagement from school; middle class students, particularly girls, not having access to a situationally based 'street culture' will tend to gravitate towards 'pop media culture for activities and symbols counter posed to the world of school. (19)

In general, Tanner found that "although the data basically supported the hypothesis-it was not as strong as expected."(131) This was especially true with respect to the pop media element.

Tanner explains that one reason for this discrepancy is the tendency on behalf of researchers to operationalize pop music as a "homogenous and indiscriminant entity"(121). In reality "a variety of "'pop taste cultures'(Gans, 1966) exist within the high school constituency, the boundaries of which are largely defined by sex and class, commitment to school, and a propensity for delinquent leisure activities."(129) Speaking further to the notion of diverse taste cultures, Tanner writes, "it is only when we look beyond the format rock music of the top 40 that we find forms of rock music capable of providing signs and symbols congruent with a rejection of school values and authority."(129) For instance, he found that working class school rejectors and delinquents tend to combine traditional cues of delinquent street culture(ie leather jacket, long hair)with a particular expression of pop culture, namely heavy metal. To explain the former's affinity to heavy metal, he postulates that:

> while for most adolescent interest in pop music may be expressive of a temporary(and at most partial) rejection of adult norms, for delinquents, heavy metal's characteristic loud and defiant sound may become expressive of a more permanent status where the ordinary

> avenues to success are seen as blocked and where the attendant middle-class norms are over-rejected. (139)

Tanner concludes that "it is not pop music per se which furnishes an oppositional milieu to the school, but more accurately, it is particular types of rock music which fulfill this function."(129)

Thus, a review of the sociology of pop music reveals some serious contradictions. To date, neither position has received conclusive systematic empirical support. In fact, there appears to be as many studies supporting the claim of causal influence as there are studies refuting it. About the only thing the literature seems to agree upon is the overwhelming need for more research in the area.

As mentioned earlier, I found only one pertinent empirical study on rap at the time of writing this thesis. In that study, Epstein et al.(1990) examined the possible relationship between rap and behavioural problems of youth in an inner-urban middle school. They tested three hypothesis: 1) musical preference relates to race, 2) musical preference can predict behavioural problems, and 3) commitment to popular music measured in hours can predict behavioural problems. Their findings reveal that only the first hypothesis proved valid. In their summary, the three researchers recommend further research on the topic and a need for a re-evaluation of the public perception of rap. They also stress the need for future studies to incorporate a suitable blend of empirical methodology with a critical theoretical understanding of rap music and its subculture.

Despite this empirical malnourishment, one area that has seen a surprising increase in scholarly attention is the cultural politics of rap. Drawing energy and guidance from Critical Theory and Post-Modernism, this growing body of literature examines the new political direction of rap and the potential impact that it may have on its listeners.

In his article on the politics of aesthetic authenticity and rap, Gilroy argues that cultural expression has always functioned within a hierarchy of creativity.(1991) He contends that a pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies art with the body and white art with the mind reflects this hierarchy.(118) And although conscious rap, with its emphasis on critical consciousness, is a direct contravention of this historical dualism, the dominant hegemonic discourse persists in casting it in a somewhat inferior corporeal aesthetic light.(124) Gilroy's fear is that such discourse will foster a sense of false consciousness in the hip-hop community, resulting again in artists and audiences believing that the only aesthetic forms they are capable of producing and receiving are physical.

Rose states that her "central concern is the exercise of institutional and ideological power over hip hop and the manner in which the hip hop community(fans and artists) relate and respond to this context."(1991: 43) In her view, the "social construction of rap and rap-related violence is fundamentally linked to dominant institutional discourse(ie media) and practices(arena rap concerts, police, etc.) which are based on the notions of containment and fear of a planet."(43) Thus, one has to consider the notion of resistance not just in terms of lyrical content but also in terms of the hidden struggle over context, meaning and public space. Moreover, Rose adds that "to dismiss rappers who do not choose so-called political subjects as having no politically resistive meaning requires ignoring the complex web of institutional policing to which all rappers and rap fans are subject."(45) She cites rap's association with base-booming cars and outrageous symbolic attire as examples of this broader definition of resistance, since they celebrate one's alien status as an act of defiance and self-possession.(46)

Stephens provides a similar analysis of the dialectical tension between political rap's call for autonomy and the structural forces that constrain it.(1991) But in a more positive slant, he conceptualizes conscious rap as a "'double-voiced' discourse capable of crossing racial barriers."(78) He bases this conception on a reading of what constitutes political rap. Included in this reading is (1) a discussion of conscious rap as a form of traditional Afrocentric discourse(as opposed to Eurocentric), (2) as a postmodern artform, and (3) as a parallel of critical theory based on a content analysis twenty popular albums and singles. Through this reading he shows that openness, universalism, integration and intelligence. characterize conscious rap.

Stephens states that conscious rap reflects traditional Afrocentric discourse in three ways. One, it relies on narrative form, riddles and proverbs and a preference for dynamic rather than fixed ideas. Two, conscious rap, like all rap, is rhythm. Stephens calls on other scholars to flesh out the importance of rhythm. Senghor, for instance, writes that "rhythm is the architecture of our being. . . only rhythm gives the word its effective fullness."(1961: 164) Ventura points out that:

"while Europeans built cathedrals as monuments to their spirit, Africans built their monuments in their bodies, with rhythm."(1985: 164) Three, and directly related to rhythm, is rap's orientation toward call-and-response. Call and response is a process in which a speaker governs the use of a language under tutelage of the audience. Stephens points out, that this orientation toward the audience and the interactive is very much different from "ideal-type Eurocentric discourse which is speaker-oriented and uni-directional."(1991: 76)

Stephen's suggests that rap reflects five central characteristics of postmodern art:

> Rap's tales of urban life's ruptures and its ambiguous relationship to mainstream American culture reflect its (1)indeterminancy. Its (2)decanonization is evident in both style and substance: by defying musical rules, by describing His-story as genocidal ideology, etc. Rap is a (3)hybrid form, putting samples of cultural icons of the past into a contemporary format, integrating elements of grunge and reggae. Rap is (4) performance and participation, in which no one has the final say and no one's version is treated as 'Holy Writ'. Finally, rap is an (5)immanent forum for individuals to reinvent themselves through the manipulation of symbols. (78)

As a parallel to critical theory, Stephens also identifies four major themes in his content analysis of twenty popular conscious rap albums and singles. The first theme emerging from the music is self-critique. Many conscious rappers call on their audience to grow up and to teach and learn what it is to be Black. An important aspect within this critique is the call by rappers, especially among the growing number of female rappers, to restore the power, dignity and beauty of female imagery. Only after achieving this self-respect and -awareness can the music truly bring change.

The second major theme is societal critique. Stephens informs us that many conscious rappers such as KRS-1 and Public Enemy refer to history as a fiction created for the benefit of White males. They typically challenge conventional wisdom concerning the bible as well as why Blacks fail. Other nationalist-inspired rappers express not only cultural pride but superiority. Brand Nubians and X-Clan typify this concept. For instance, Stephens points out that "X-Clan has its own 'black consciousness' mythology, with Egypt as first civilization and Europe as a culture stolen by caveboy(Whites) oppressors.(79) Still other rappers such as Schooly D and Paris think only confrontation will bring liberation.

The third major theme is cultural critique, otherwise known as the regenerative power of music. Stephens suggest that while conscious rap is explicitly oppositional, it is also housed in a structure designed to by-pass or move beyond the limitations of an oppositional space. This structure has a creative tension or, what he calls flexible unity, between self-affirmation and solidarity that inevitably leads to transformation:

> Transcendence is achieved through a dialectical tension: The freedom to do one's own thing within the structure of a moveable unity-keeping it on the 'One'(meaning to come together). (80)

It is not hard to see the parallel between this flexible unity and Giroux's language of possibility.

Finally, there is the theme of racial critique. Stephens asserts that "rap's discourse on race must be seen within the context of African-Americans' ongoing debate on the proper relations with Euro-American society."(81) On one side of this debate are many rap artists such as Ice-Cube, X-Clan, Brand Nubians, and Paris who espouse a hip-hop ideology founded on a mythologized memory of the power movement. For instance, they employ a variety of code words such as 'vulture', 'caveboy' and 'devils' to signify a developing ideology of white inferiority:

> The Word vulture refers to the term 'culture vulture', ie. the belief that whites have no culture except that which they have stolen from non-Europeans. 'Cave-boy is a generic reference to white males which signifies a diseased consciousness developed in the absence of the sun. And 'devils' reflects the influence of the Nation of Islam teachings formulated by Elijah Mohammed and popularized by Malcom X. (83

While on the other side, popular rappers such as Queen Latifah, KRS-1, and Rebel MC resonate with Martin Luther King Jr.'s call toward mutual cooperation and experience.

Both Demott(1988) and Wheeler(1991) build on the work of Hall and Jefferson(1975) and Willis(1977) by directing their attention toward the need to recognize the mix of accommodation and resistance in street corner culture. With this objective in mind, both proceed to develop Levi Strauss' concept of bricolage around rap to show how the latter operates as an inherently critical and resilient symbolic system of subcultural expression. DeMott defines bricolage as the "reordering and recontextualizing of objects to communicate fresh meaning within a system of significances which already include prior and sedimented meanings attached to the objects."(43) In other words, bricolage is what Hall and Jefferson define as "those symbolic discourses of style, fashion and attitude appropriated and re-presented by subculture as means to express meaning and win space."(1975: 47)

DeMott argues that "rap has been responsible for some of the smartest and most remarkable acts of subcultural bricolage."(1988: 47) The extremely fertile and dynamic vernacular of hip hop slang is one excellent example of bricolage. DeMott contends that this form of counter-symbolism is a "potent source of generational solidarity, and one that is providing its listeners with a new idiom."(47) He also makes the point that the rap vernacular is frequently challenged by dominant institutions who treat or approach the rap vernacular with an imperialistic contempt.

Attitude as style represents a second example of rap's use of bricolage. DeMott asserts most rap "inculcates a way of being in the world:

> Most rappers teach and embody the cunning and high spirits their youthful ghetto constituencies need to overcome the fears, threats and challenges that stalk their neighbourhoods. (48)

Often this rough, gangster attitude takes on an ironic response to ideological expectations by the dominant culture. For instance, Wheeler reveals that "many rappers play up this stereotyped gangster image not as a description of reality but as a creative act of protest against bourgeoisie sensibilities. As one rapper proclaims, "Blacks are sick and tired of proving that we are not the stereotype that they think we are."(1991: 202)

The negative manner in which males view women reflects another aspect of attitudinal bricolage. Misogynist tendencies even permeate much of the so-called conscious rappers, such as Public Enemy and Ice Cube. But as DeMott points out,"their rage against women tends to be entangled with justifiable kinds of bitterness arising from racial and class circumstances."(50) Wheeler informs us that"besides sexism, rap's love of adolescent maleness is the result of historical atrocities perpetrated by whites."(203) Thus, in her view, it is an act of self-defence. She adds that "Hip hop also dwells on the male adolescent body because in the inner city it is the young men who go away: to prison, to die, into the underworld of crime."(203) These views are consistent with Staples who writes that "the male conception of sexuality is.a secondary symbol of manhood in a society that denies him the primary signs of masculinity, such as high status jobs. . . and it is employed as a cautious and deliberate weapon against whites."(1978: 176)

DeMott also attends to the pressing issue of bricolage as it pertains to rap and commercialization. Here he speaks directly to both Toop(1984) and Hebdige(1979) who address the phenomenon of how subcultural style always begins as a means of resistance and inevitably ends up diluted and disarmed by mainstream assimilation. DeMott acknowledges that rap's encounters with the "culture industry and mass media have diminished the subculture's readiness to resist blatant imitation and stagnation"; but on the whole, he feels that the "homogenization of hip hop has been retarded by the strength of the subculture's commitment to the fundamental principle of originality."(51) Here, Demott refers to George who points out that the rappers constant use of the term 'fresh' reflects this principle of originality:

> Fresh is as important a word in hip hop as groovy was in the counter culture. If groovy meant a relaxed, unstructured, anything goes attitude, fresh signifies something good, exciting, positive, different, new. It represents a culture that celebrates innovation and rejects blatant imitation and stagnation. (1985)

Wheeler also looks to George who points out another reason for rap's staying power:

> Hip hop is not a fad; it's something important. It's a way for the people of the ghetto to make themselves heard. They invented it and they will keep it going. Everyone else can bite our rhymes, our dress, our steps, our style, but they still have to come uptown to find out what's really happening. (1985)

To sum up, considerable coverage in the literature on popular music has focussed on the issue of whether popular music causes or merely reflects and reinforces existing adolescent social and economic environments. Most of the findings to date appear to be characterized by controversy and inconsistency. For instance, we have seen how some studies, such as Verden and King appear to support, be it directly or indirectly, the 'hypodermic theory' of popular music as a causal force on teen behaviour. However, other studies such as Leming, Frith, etc contend that lyrical significance and comprehension are highly problematic; still other writers such as Arnett, Blau and Tanner reveal that teens relationship to oppositional forms of music is a manifestation of chronically maligned social and economic circumstance. As for the literature on rap's cultural politics, many writers suggest that conscious rap is, among other things, a resilient, didactic, inherently critical and quintessential expression of post-modern art. The only universal thread running through the literature is the agreement that more theoretical and empirical work is necessary in the sociology of music, particularly for rap given its relative newness and highly explicit content.

The literature advances a number of substantive issues and insights into resistance theory and its dynamic relationship to popular music, particularly rap music. On the theory itself, it is worthwhile reiterating that the literature criticizes resistance theory for being (1) theoretically closed, (2) conceptually overstated or nebulous, and (3) empirically malnourished and careless, especially regarding its under- or mistreatment of structural variables other than class, ie. race, gender, age. But the literature also reveals that the theory's dialectical approach to structure/agency, decidedly openly political orientation and empirical inquiries into such areas as symbolic mediation(ie. ritual/styles) and the affective have greatly illuminated our understanding of how subculture experience produces and reproduces itself. A review of the popular and scholarly literature on pop music reveals two controversial issues: (1) the relative autonomy of music, ie. its ability to shape behaviour, and (2) the relationship between taste cultures and dislocated socio-economic conditions. Regarding the former, the data has yet to prove conclusively whether music influences behaviour. About the only things that researchers agree on is that this contentious area needs more theoretical grounding and empirical work. The second issue has received stronger empirical support. We saw how both heavy metal and rap music are shaped by and appeal to the angry, alienated and oppositional sentiments of marginalized youth cultures.

Chapter IV

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to, first, describe the source and composition of the research group. Secondly, it will describe the various instruments used to operationalize the central concepts employed in this study, and to explain the underlying rationale for their inclusion. Thirdly, it will describe how the data were collected.

Group Profile

The group for the study was composed of sixteen Black-Canadian youths, ranging in age from fifteen to nineteen. All sixteen students, seven of whom were female, were selectively sampled according to their strong interest in and awareness of rap music. Fifteen of the sixteen attended the same high school in Edmonton, with the one exception being a first year student at the University of Alberta. Thirteen of the students were born in Canada, one in the United States, one in the Caribbean, and one in Africa. All of the students attended at least junior and senior high school in Canada, mainly in Ontario and/or Alberta. Their parents were predominantly African-Carribean or -North American, middle class, and had some form of post-secondary vocational training/academic education.

Through our encounters I discovered that the students shared many qualities and experiences, both inside and out of school. One common and important sentiment shared by the group was their expressed underlying dissatisfaction with teacher and curriculum insensitivity toward multi-racial experience and representation. For example, several students complained about the myopic hyper-European focus that they confronted both in lectures and in textbooks. But despite this dissatisfaction, the group still appeared quite well adjusted and actively involved in school, both socially and academically. Of the fifteen high school students, eleven were streamed in matriculation, with the remaining four in the general diploma program. The university student was studying science. Most of the males at one time or another played varsity sports, particularly basketball. The group seemed to manage a dynamic balance between cross-racial interaction and recognizing and promoting their own Black cultural experience. For example, cross-racial dating, though at times expressed as problematic, did exist[2] ; on the other hand, I observed a meeting of several female students trying to organize and implement a Black varsity STEP squad. Outside of school, the group enjoyed 'hanging around' with their friends and listening to 'their' music. Holding community-based hall dances were a particular favourite. Several students held part-time jobs, often for the expressed purpose of buying or maintaining their automobiles. For them, the car was a symbol of the independence that they so highly valued. This association seemed especially true for the males. Finally, I found the group shared an impressive level of wisdom, maturity and compassion. In short, the group struck me generally as being very centred.

The high school used for this study is one of the largest high schools in Edmonton, with 2032 students enrolled in 1993-94. In the past it was characteristically very anglo-surburban and affluent. But since 1988 the school has been undergoing some major demographic changes. Today, it is noticeably more dynamic in terms of race, class and ethnicity. And though the present numbers are by no means large (the school's administration estimated around 60-70 Blacks attended in 1993-94), they still represent a significant departure, relatively speaking, from the past. Perhaps more important than the numbers is the school's growing reputation within and without the Black community as an emerging cultural diverse school. Several of the students I interviewed, in fact, commuted from distant suburbs partly for this very reason. Coincidentally, in the past few years the Edmonton Journal newspaper has reported incidents of racial violence at the school, which may be linked to this growing diversity. However, many students I interviewed rejected the race factor, claiming it was greatly exaggerated by the local media.

I chose this high school as my source for two reasons. One, as just mentioned, the school's increasing cultural diversity made it an appropriate site. Two, I also had easy accessibility to this population. Having attended the school myself, both as a student and student teacher, I was familiar with the school and several teacher contacts who were willing to(not to mention very successful at) helping me recruit appropriate students.

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[2] For insight into this matter and an excellent overall discussion of the social construction of Black youth identity and experience within and out of school, see Under the Gaze, by Jenny Spencer M. Ed thesis in print March 1995, University of Alberta, Department of Educational Policy Studies.

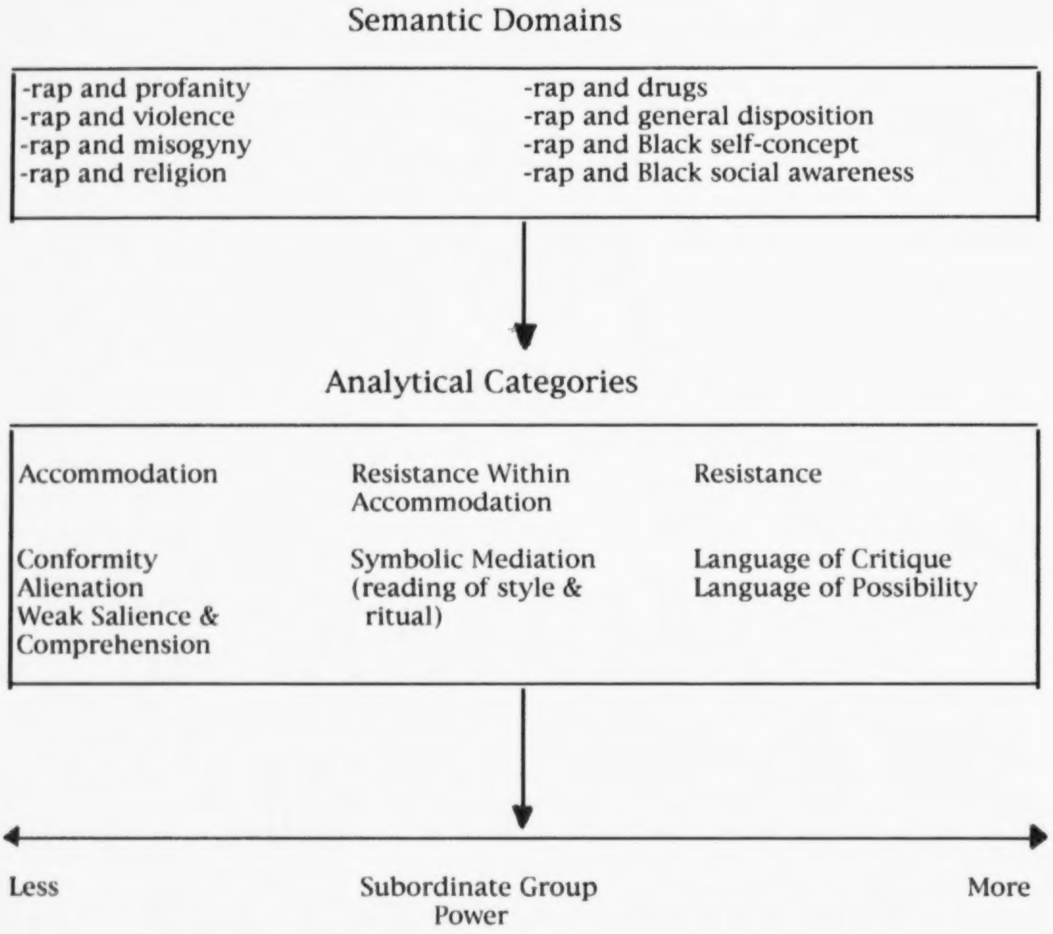
Operational Measures and Semantic Domains

As mentioned in chapter one, the primary aim of this study was to discover whether Black-Canadian youth were perceiving and/or using rap as a form of resistance. An ancillary objective was to explore the group's attitudes toward some of rap music's most controversial themes, as identified in the literature. To answer these two questions, I looked to the theory and literature to assist me in the construction of relevant analytical categories of resistance and semantic domains.

I found the analytical categories and semantic domains very useful for a novice ethnographer like myself because they acted as a frame of reference- a roadmap or a lighthouse so to speak. That is to say, they gave me the confidence and an underpinning as I ventured into the massive, unfamiliar wilderness of data collection and analysis. The semantic domains, which loosely revolved around a repertoire of songs, provided the basis for constructing questions designed to elicit attitudinal/value responses from the students that addressed my research questions. It is important to point out that the instrument never remained static. I used open-ended questions and prompted elaborations on closed-responses to encourage the students' inquiry into their own understanding, thus reducing the possibility of interviewer bias. In the analysis stage of the findings, the analytical categories and their respective indicators facilitated the sorting and slotting of the large volume of responses. Thus, making the task of discovering the nature and degree of resistance more expedient and clear.

According to Giroux, "any definition of resistance has to wrestle not only with the question of what it is but also with the question of what it is not."(1983: 142) Moreover, one has to assume that in its relationship to power and the dominant group, a subculture is not totally passive nor totally resistant, but rather continually shifting between the two poles. Based on these two aspects of Giroux, I constructed a framework that consisted of three interconnected analytical categories and situated them on a shifting spectrum of power. Those three categories were: accommodation, resistance within accommodation (or RWA), and resistance. Each category was fit with its respective indicators. The indicators included: conformity, alienation and weak salience/comprehension for accommodation, symbolic mediation within RWA, and languages of critique and possibility within resistance. Semantic domains generated student responses which were ultimately plugged into the three analytical categories, thus giving me a read on both the primary and ancillary research questions. A diagram of my methodological framework is provided below, followed by a description and rationale for the categories and semantic domains.

Methodological Framework



Analytical Categories

'Accommodation', or reproduction refers to "those aspects of social and cultural knowledge, values and attitudes that contribute directly to the legitimation and perpetuation of ideologies, practices and privileges constitutive of the present dominant economic and political structure."(105)

I define conformity as the acceptance or endorsement of the dominant economic order and conventional norms/success goals. Thus, placing a major emphasis on such things as material success, career, competitive achievement, academic creditation are considered characteristics of conformity. Also included under this operationalization of conformity are attitudes and behaviours that suppress(or at least had the potential to suppress) emancipatory interests, ie., expressions of homophobia, sexism(misogyny), of autocracy, etc.. The decision to include this indicator seems obvious to me since, by definition, students that largely conform to or endorse conventional norms and success goals could hardly represent valid agents of resistance or radical opposition.

The following composite items are selected because I feel they adequately reflect or are indicative of a neo-Marxian notion of alienation. Self-estrangement/isolation includes such traits as the expressed lack of integrated meaning, purpose and self-worth, the perception that life-goals are receding rather than being realized, and hyper self-indulgence/self-destructive behaviour. (Tucker, 1978: 118-119) Social-estrangement is a sense of social disconnectedness as well as disruption of in-group solidarity and esteem; often nihilistic or apathetic references are made to predatory aspects of subculture, such as Black on Black crime/violence, drug-addiction, illegitimacy. Reification is ideology as a form of unconsciousness in which the historically contingent nature of self- and social relations under capitalism(ie social world) are forgotten and thus take on the appearance of mythic permanence and unchanging reality.(Lukacs, 1968) As mentioned earlier, this item speaks directly to Giroux and his forms of subjective domination. Powerlessness is the perception that the social world, particularly government/authority, is indifferent and/or antithetical to one's own needs; moreover a feeling that one cannot influence or change these negative social surroundings. Thus a sense of futility or apathy is present. Including alienation in my analysis is a must. Alienation, as operationalized here, definitely functions as an obstacle to resistance. Expressions, for example, of self/social-estrangement or reification would certainly prevent at worst and limit at best the potential manifestation of a collectively organized and 'active' critique of and struggle against structural domination.

The final indicator of accommodation, weak salience and comprehension, refers to the particular absence of adequate consumption, endorsement and/or comprehension of rap music with predominantly political themes by the students. As with conformity, the inclusion of this indicator seems obvious since one could not interpret rap as a mediating form of resistance if the students largely avoid, reject and or fail to comprehend its more political themes.

The second category operationalized, 'Resistance Within Accommodation' (or RWA), typically refers to subtle, latent, and/or contradictory mediations and practices that are naturally manifested in the struggle of oppressed groups to win space and secure power.(Hall & Jefferson, 1975) Modes of resistance within accommodation, by definition, represent 'something in between', ie., they simultaneously resist and accommodate domination. Put another way, RWA typically interdicts at the surface of domination but rarely effects change at the deeper structural level.

As witnessed in literature review, one predominant index of resistance within accommodation is symbolic mediation. Symbolic mediation refers to the way and degree to which dominant hegemony is resisted or confronted by sub-cultural groups at the symbolic/ideological level. Indicators of this mode of resistance within accommodation come by way of reading the nature and function of *style* and *ritual*. Hall and Jefferson define style as "visible objects and materials differentially selected from the dominant meaning system which produce a distinct group identity and outlook."(47) Modes or carriers of style include language, dress, attitude, music, etc. McLaren defines ritual as a "form of recurring symbolic action composed primarily of gestures and postures, which are related to everyday life and may oscillate between randomness and formality."(1985: 85)

Two ways that style and ritual may be read are active and reproductive. *Active* modes are intentional or conscious attempts by oppositional agents to subvert/challenge dominant hegemony. Here, sub-groups invest dominant symbols, styles and commodities with their own authentic and self-styled meanings and attitudes.(Hall and Jefferson, 1975) Under this mode, subcultural styles and rituals galvanize in-group solidarity and autonomy, more or less radicalize consciousness by deconstructing the familiar and offering critique, and generate a heightened degree of status and creativity.(52) *Reproductive* mediations, on the other hand, signify ideological incorporation and creative sublimation to the dominant culture.(56) This refers to the classic case of "sell-out" syndrome. There is a tendency to copy or imitate personal style directly instead of making one's own signature. Banality and stagnation of ideas and images prevails. Hall and Jefferson speak of the instance of 'defusion' or what they sometimes call 'castrated style'.(185) What this means is that a particular style is dislocated from the ingroup context which generated it, and is taken with a stress on those elements(eg, dress, attitude) which make it a commercial proposition, especially their novelty.(186) Rap music is arguably the most symbolically expressive genre of popular music. It creates, shapes, hides and hustles an entire counter meaning system via a complex and dynamic repertoire of attitudes, styles and language. Given this rich milieu of symbolic mediation, it is imperative that I explore the nature and degree to which these symbols are being received and/or incorporated into the everyday lives of the students.

The third category created is 'resistance'. Giroux states that for any (sub)cultural symbol or act to be truly resistive or have at least resistive potential, it must meet two fundamental criteria. First, it must speak a language of critique, and second a language of possibility.

There are three components to Giroux's language of critique. First, it means an oppositional agent must be conscious or aware of the social function of dominant ideas and practices and his/her perceived relationship to these structures. Secondly, this consciousness must be critical. That is, it must challenge or call into question all or particular underlying tensions, inequities and/or contradictions inherent in political, social, economic and religious sectors of the dominant hegemonic terrain. Thus, indicators of this critique may come as an attack, for instance, on capitalism, or politicians, etc.. Thirdly, this consciousness must be grounded in a social nexus. As Giroux repeatedly stresses, one critically conscious subject does not constitute resistance; an individual or an individual act of resistance must be part or representative of a broader collective force or movement. Hence the word 'agent'. Including this indicator in my analysis is binding. It would be next to impossible to lay claim to a terrain of resistance if the students were without a language of critique. For how could one advance a notion of systemic transformation if the group were not critical of the system? As Giroux points out, recognizing and problematizing the prevailing system of needs in capitalist society-or any repressive society-is the first step in breaking with the logic and institutions of domination.

As mentioned in chapter II, a logic or act of resistance does not stop at the stage of interrogative awareness. Being critically conscious of oppressive structures, while absolutely crucial, is still only half the battle. For an idea/act to be truly resistive it also must possess what Giroux calls a "revealing or latent function"; that is, it must create at least the possibility to transform lives into something better than 'what is'. Giroux typically understates definitions of what constitutes a better or different world in order to avoid appearing hypocritically dogmatic. Although occasionally, as mentioned earlier, he does intimate at some possible general indicators of an alternative orientation: ie. "needs based on meaningful social relations, community, freedom, creative work, and a fully developed aesthetic sensibility."(148) With this emphasis on relative openness in mind, I likewise decided to keep my indicators broad, largely letting the students define their own vision of a more just society according to their needs, their history. As with the language of critique, the decision to include a language of possibility is imperative. It is the second cornerstone in the theory, ie., the central component in the struggle to transcend the petrifying dualism that has plagued the agency/structure debate.

Semantic Domains

Rap and (1) 'Profanity', (2)'violence', (3)'misogyny', (4)'religion' and (5)'drugs' comprise the 'domains of controversy'. These five domains strive to explore and describe participants' attitudes and perceptions of rap themes typically drawing the most public criticism and scrutiny(as identified in the literature). The rationale for using these domains are twofold. First, as mentioned earlier, finding out what actual listeners think about these various themes may improve our understanding of the rap phenomenon. Second, the fact that these thematic domains constitute 'controversy' implies the existence of conflict and struggle against the norm. Thus by addressing these five controversial themes in rap, I may be tacitly tapping into unchartered expressions and terrains of resistance and/or reproduction.

Rap and (6)'general disposition', (7)'raising- self-concept' and (8)'raising social-awareness' constitute the 'domains of resistance'. Unlike with the domains of controversy, these three domains are selected because they speak directly from Giroux and potentially to cases of actual resistance.

'General disposition' explores and describes the group's basic perceptions and attitudes toward conventional definitions of success(ie money, career, etc) and means to that success, ie., formal schooling, as well as their overall view of the future. If the group largely conforms to dominant norms and perceives the future either in terms of great favour or alienation, then a case for resistance or radical potential would be seriously weakened. The domain of 'rap and raising self- concept' provides a window into how the students perceive and/or critique themselves as Black-Canadians, both individually and collectively, and rap's role in that formation. This is an important domain because it speaks directly to Giroux's desire to recover the centrality of autonomy. For instance, if the group demonstrates a highly indulgent or alienated self-concept, then it may greatly impair or constrict any radical possibility. Finally, 'rap and raising social awareness' addresses the group's insights and impressions of the dominant political and economic order. This domain speaks directly to a language of critique and possibility. If the group uses rap to criticize severely dominant institutions and structural arrangements and/or offer an alternative life-world orientation, then a case for resistance would be strongly served.

Method of Data Collection

The data for the study were provided from one short preliminary questionnaire and sixteen semi-structured tape recorded interviews that were all conducted at the group's high school in December 1993. Advertisements were placed in the school bulletin and read over the school radio asking students to attend my lunchhour orientation. The orientation provided the opportunity to introduce myself and the topic, plus discuss relevant ethical concerns regarding my field research.

The preliminary questionnaire, which was administered by me, served three purposes. One, it assisted me in the selection of suitable students for the study. For instance, a Likert-based rap taste-preference scale helped identify appropriate candidates. Two, and in a related sense, a similar scale provided me with information concerning the listening habits and salience of political/gangster rap among the group. Three, having the students write down their interpretations of their three favourite songs provided me with data that addressed comprehension. However, the utility of this latter data were somewhat limited. Many student responses were either illegible or incomplete. Students appeared to disdainfully reject the written part of the questionnaire because it represented another school assignment to them. I therefore decided to pursue the issue of comprehension in the interviews. This decision proved fruitful as the students' verbal skills appeared demonstrably stronger than their written skills.

I chose the ethnographic interview format because the researcher, theory, subjects and subject matter demanded it. As a novice researcher, I had to come to terms with my limitations. One major limitation is that I am lousy with numbers. I simply do not visualize the world that way. I think more in terms of circles than lines, colours than numbers. And like the Chicago School before me, I prefer the human dimension of research. I also wanted to model my research according to the emerging school of openly ideological critical ethnography which is decidedly qualitative. (Lather, 1989) In terms of the theory of resistance, as the literature pointed out, it desperately needs more accurate conceptual development. Qualitative research meets this need because of its inherent ability to produce large amounts of expansive and contextual data quickly. In terms of subjects, as mentioned in chapter one, no one has really paid much attention to what young people think and feel about life, especially marginalized youth subcultures. The interview format was ideal for giving these neglected subjects an opportunity to describe their perceptions and their way of life. Regarding subject matter, the very nature of rap music, with its emphasis on living dialogue and rhythmic feeling, seemed to demand the flexible and richly interactive quality that interviews offered. Moreover, the interview format afforded the opportunity to use the music as a means to facilitate inquiry into the perceptions and experiences of the students.

The interviews usually lasted one hour and were conducted at lunchhour or during spares at the school. I initially chose one on one interviews for two reasons. First, given that most of my interviews were restricted to the lunch hour, I felt it would be the best way to generate indepth data. Secondly, I felt that the sensitive themes of rap(ie., its graphic depictions of sex, violence and political themes) would be best attended to on an individual basis. However, on a few occasions unsolicited students began expressing interest in the research. This interest appeared to be due to the positive reviews being circulated by participants of previous interviews. Perhaps due to shyness and/or nervousness, these new inquiries requested to do the interviews with a friend or two. At first, I was reluctant for reasons just stated. But ultimately I agreed for the simple fact that there were only so many Black students in the school, and thus I was forced largely to take who I could get, so to speak. I also wanted to recruit as many students as possible for purposes of validation. In the end, I must say that the group interviews were as equally productive as the individual ones. The inter-personal dynamic seemed to stimulate energy and candour, not inhibit them. Moreover, it acted as a kind of cross-validation or triangulation, in that the participants were inclined to be forthright in front of their friends.

Each interview began with me asking the students set questions regarding their basic values, attitudes and aspirations. I typically asked them to respond to selected touchstone words such as 'money', 'success', 'school' and the 'future'. These questions served two functions. One they helped break the ice, so to speak; and two, they addressed the issue of conformity. I then played four songs in random order, one of which was in the form of a video. The four songs were "U.N.I.T.Y.", by Queen Latifah, "The Real Holy Place", by KRS-1, "Interlude", by Public Enemy, and "Wake Up", by "Brand Nubians". I also relied on two other songs by KRS-1 and PE, although I did not actually play them. They were "Sex and Violence" and "Fight the Power" respectively. In both cases, I focused on just one specific line that facilitated political discussion. For instance, in the song "Sex and violence" I asked the students to explain what KRS-1 meant by the line, "Capitalism: the system of pimps and ho's", and whether they agreed with it. A sample of the lyrics appears in appendix one.

For each song, I relied on a set of predetermined questions to maintain goal-directedness, structure and continuity. The scheduled questions were designed to measure salience, comprehension and values correspondence between the listener and major themes present in the songs. However, on many occasions, depending on the song and where a participant wanted to take an initial question, I readily shifted to unscheduled probes to obtain important data. Particular attention was paid to finding out how the songs related to the students own experiences, both cognitively and affectively. For instance, I asked the students questions about how the music, particularly the beat, made them feel individually and in a group. A general list of the predetermined questions appears in appendix four.

Additional examples of my questioning strategy surface in the next chapter.

Finally, three factors went into the selection of the songs. One, I tried to pick songs with clear sounding lyrics and/or were short. This was done to enhance dialogue and maximize time. Two, I employed only those songs that were distinctly hard hitting, controversial and political. I did this for two reasons. One, I felt that the use of explicit and provocative songs also would stimulate dialogue. Two, I used politically thick themes because I wanted to create the optimum condition for a reading of resistance. For example, the song "Fight the Power" is an explicit attack on institutional oppression and racism. Measuring how much a participant comprehended and/or identified with the song's call to "fight the power", therefore, served as a relatively effective indicator of resistance. Three, great effort was also made to use songs that reflected the group's taste preference. However, in a few instances, this correspondence stopped with the artist. For instance, while most of the students indicated a strong preference for political rapper KRS-1, they did not necessarily specify a favourite song. As a result, I selectively sampled "Real Holy Place" because the song forcefully addressed controversial and/or political themes.

Chapter V

Findings

Rap: Domains of Controversy.

As mentioned in the introduction, rap music is a very controversial popular art form. Many institutional authorities directly or indirectly accuse rap of promoting social pathologies such as vulgarity, violence, and the mistreatment of women. However, the literature largely ignores the actual fans of the music. How do they perceive the more controversial themes in rap? For instance, do they feel the music is morally corrupting? We need to examine their attitudes and views if our aim is to better understand the music and the people who listen to it. Moreover, the theory informs us that dominant institutional discourse and practices seek to win or shape conformity to conventional norms. Therefore, the participants' responses to these controversial themes may in fact harbour tacit expressions of resistance. Thus the following five domains of controversy aim to serve two purposes: (1) to gather descriptive data on how the students perceive controversial themes in rap music, and (2) to explore for possible oppositional expression or sentiment embedded in these perceptions.

Profanity is at the forefront of the controversy surrounding rap. Critics argue that the music's crude images and profane language are offensive and morally corrupting. However, the theory(Giroux, 1983) and the literature(Rose,1991) (DeMott, 1988) suggests that profane symbols also may be employed by subcultures as a means to win/defend cultural space and challenge domination. With these two widely divergent positions in mind, I asked my research group to share their views on the issue of profanity.

In certain cases the group agree with institutional authorities that sometimes the language is unnecessary and crude. Trish, for example, talks about there being an appropriate time and place for profanity:

> Sometimes it can be too much. But there's a time and place for everything, you know. I don't have a problem with it [the swearing] when it's in the right situation, like at a party or something.

Many students point out that some rappers use profanity in their songs to cover up the fact that they lack real talent. Moreover, they are impressively astute at distinguishing between real and shallow rappers:

> I: What about the accusations that rap is vulgar, do you agree?
> Bruce: To some extent.
> Floyd: Yeah. Some take it overboard. Like 2Live Crew. That's stupidness. They didn't take any time to make proper music. It's like they just got on the mike and said all this nasty stuff. They aren't really thinking about their rhymes. Cindy: If a rapper puts in too many swears, it makes you think that they are not even thinking. You're not projecting any kind of message.
>
> Doug: Some of the gangster rappers cuss a lot to cover up the fact that they don't have any intelligent wording. It's like when you read an intelligent book, you get all these bg words and big plots and it's the same with lyrics. Rappers are writers too. And there are shallow rappers and intelligent rappers.

In the passage below, Carolyn and Deb express conflicting opinions on the profanity issue. On the one hand, they attack some rap for its superfluous profanity. Deb even alludes to the possibility that young children internalize such profanity. However, on the other hand, they point out, as do many other students, that profanity is sometimes an effective form of expressing one's emotions. Moreover, they contend that authorities have intentionally overstated the amount of profanity in rap to serve their own interests:

> I: How do you view all the swearing in rap?
> Carolyn: Sometimes it's like enough already. But it can be used to emphasize things.
> Deb: If somebody is really mad, then I'll let it go. But if it's just a song and they're swearing, then that annoys me. Because it doesn't have to be there. And little kids don't need that. A lot of it doesn't have to be there. It's pointless and sends sort of the wrong message. Other groups like parents get a bad idea of rap. They say all rap is like that because some artists swear a lot.
> Carolyn: People like that don't try other things out. They generalize to support their point of view.

For other students profanity is, if not acceptable, at least excusable or understandable because it comes from the streets. Yvonne and Monica illustrate this relationship between profanity and the reality factor:

> I: What do you think of all the swearing in rap?
> Yvonne: It's a lot. But again, it's reality, so I don't really mind it all.
>
> Monica: Some of the lyrics, like 2LiveCrew, are ignorant and nasty. A lot of the swearing is unnecessary. I also hate how some rappers brag. But everyone swears. The only difference is these people are saying it.

> You'll see a lot of stars up there, and then you'll see them in a different light and it's like whoa! The only difference with these guys is they are talking like they usually do. Like TuPac, he's good looking, and I'm sure he gets around. He's just being himself.

Floyd advances the notion that some rappers use profanity to sell records. However, he does not condemn them for doing it. Instead, he justifies this desire to 'make a buck' because he views it as practical and natural behaviour:

> Floyd: In my opinion, they can say what they want. I mean people act like rappers are superhuman and all out just to make a positive message. They want to make a buck, too. If something is going to sell, then they're going to say it. And so they act like it's a crime to want to make money. You can't force something that's not your own style. Some rappers want to sing about Black power; others just wanna sing about having fun. That's just the way each is.

Many students downplay the profanity in rap by pointing to its preponderance in other more prime structural factors, such as personal choice, family, and the media:

> Floyd: People sit there and say all that offensive stuff is bad. But I don't have to listen to it. Nobody forced my hand to turn on the t.v. or radio.
> I: But won't some kids be taking it and acting on it?
> Cindy: Your kids shouldn't be listening to that at that age. People don't control their kids anymore.
> Floyd: You can only blame it on the music so much.
>
> Trish: I can see from the point of the cussing. Like my dad saw my Snoop tape with the explicit warning on it. And he said why are you listening to this? I said I don't have a problem with it because you hear it at school anyways.
> Darrell: You hear it everyday, on t.v., movies, everything.

Though profanity is, arguably, one of the first things most disgruntled authorities pick up on in the music, it does not appear to be of primary interest to the group. In their view, profanity is somewhat of an accessory to what is ultimately most important: ie, the beat and the message:

> Monica: A lot of swearing is unnecessary. But like I said, that the way they are. And when we listen to it, we don't say, "oh my god, that's a swear". When we listen to it, we more or listen to the beat and what he has to say.
>
> Keith: I can listen to that stuff and get down with it. . . Like the lyrics can move me in the way he says it. Even if he swears, I can say that sounded fly. But I don't sit there and say, 'yeah she was a motherfuckin bitch ho or somethin'.

Doug shares this view in his remark on the economics underlying the issue of profanity in rap:

> Doug: But if someone swears on an album, I don't think someone's going to spend 13$ on a friggin tape just for that. The music has to have some flow.

The data also present an interesting irony regarding the issue of profanity and race. That is, many students blame White listeners for exacerbating the problem with profanity in rap. In their view, White listeners are more likely to buy rap for the profanity and be influenced by it than Black listeners:

> I: Do you think some kids listen to rap specifically for its shock value, like with the swearing?
> Yvonne: Yes, they do[emphatically]. Because it's so different. Like the way they take it to extremes: swearing and everything. It's almost like they're doing something bad, and they like it.
> I: Whose they, the kids?
> Yvonne: The White kids especially. Because they feel like it is rebellious. That's how they see it.
> I: And you don't think it's not quite the same with the Black kids?
> Yvonne: Not nearly. Because, like, all of the friends I have listen to it because it's a good beat or because it tells a story we can relate to.
>
> I: So do you think these vulgar lyrics are having an impact on people?
> Chantelle: Oh yeah! Ok, the guy I was seeing before, he's White. And he listens to rap, like Ice Cube and the worst things. And we got into an argument and he would say things you know, bitch this and bitch that.
> I: And so you think this has to do with him being White and that he listens to hard core?
> Chantelle: I think so. Everytime I talk to him he says how he listens to Ice Cube and he's so bad. And every second word is a swear.

Other students inform me that hard core rappers employ a lot of profanity to keep the music 'Black' and underground. In other words, the profanity serves as a symbolic means of cultural preservation:

> Doug: The 'real' hard core rappers, they make the music for Black people. It ain't made for anybody else. You see, that's why they make it hard. If they keep with the rough sounding lyrics, then it will stay Black. It will stay underground. If they make it soft, it would go commercial and all the money would leave the ghettos.
> Keith: You see, the beats got to be rough. If they make it all slack and shit, then it'll go commercial and then it won't be a Black thing anymore.

To sum up, the students, unlike most authorities, do not approach the issue of profanity in rap as an homogenous negative. On the one hand, the group attacks some rappers for using profanity simply to sell records or to gloss over a lack of talent. Students in fact show a savvy capacity to identify some of these culprits. They also allude to a causal relationship between profanity and children who lack discriminating powers. However, on the other hand, the group, at least tolerates excessive profanity in hard core because they feel it honestly reflects 'real' life in the ghetto. They also point out that not all rap is wrought with profanity. Moreover, profanity comes second to the beat and message of the song. Some students suggest that race is an issue in that they feel Whites are more apt to listen to and buy rap for the profanity.

A second major area of controversy surrounding hard core rap is its graphic depictions of casual violence. Critics complain that such excessive depictions glorify violence to the point of not only desensitizing listeners but "crossing the line between reflecting and affecting reality."(Eddie, 1994) Arguably, the amount of violence, especially Black on Black, in rap is deeply problematic to any emancipatory interests. Proponents, however, argue that violent references in the music simply mirror the ugly reality of ghetto life. They add that the rappers share an unwritten pact with their fans to be real and true to the streets, which means 'telling it like it is'. Moreover, resistance theory informs us that some violent references may serve some kind of deeper culturally redemptive or resistive purpose. For instance, such explicit symbolism may be deployed as a means to disrupt or challenge complacent or overbearing middle class sensibilities.

As with profanity, the data suggest that students disapprove of rappers that over-indulge in violent references simply to shock people or sell records:

> Russell: I hate it when all they[rappers] talk about is killing people. I think some of them do it just because they know it sells.
>
> I: What about violence in rap?
> Carolyn: Too much.
> Deb: Yeah. Like some artists I don't like even if they have fresh beats. because of their attitude.
> Carolyn: Like a lot of gangster rappers, all they talk about is violence.They talk about getting respect by shooting people down. That's so wrong! You can't take a life just because someone insults you.

However, the students also empathize with or tacitly accept what they interpret to be genuine expressions of violent sentiment. In their view, violent expressions in the music simply mirror what life is like for many rappers growing up in the projects. Monica and Yvonne illuminate this sense of empathetic understanding and reserved acceptance of the violence when it's real:

> Monica: With rap, look at how the kids grow up. They grow up seeing violence, and that's what comes out on the rap. A lot of them have been through it; maybe they're ex-gang members, and they're just rapping and telling how it is. What else do they know?
>
> Yvonne: It's[rap] like reality. That's when I think it's alright, to a certain extent.
> I: So for you, hard core rap is ok when it's reality?
> Yvonne: Yeah. It's reality for them.

Bruce, Floyd and Cindy appear even more approving of rap's graphic realism. In their view, it lets people know about what life is like in the ghetto:

> I: But what about all the references to Blacks shooting Blacks in rap?,
> Bruce: But Black on Black violence, like in LA, is real, man.
> Floyd: Yeah. That's the real, and you can't be saying, "well, they shouldn't be saying that. If you grow up in the ghetto and all you see is Black on Black crime, then what are you going to rap about?
> I: So does listening to them describe their life provide you with a window into their situation?
> All: Oh yeah!
> Floyd: If I didn't hear rap, there's no way I'd hear about that stuff.
> I: What stuff is that ?
> Floyd: All the beatings, the way the government oppresses them. Maybe on the news, maybe Rodney King or something like that.
> Cindy: Yeah. But the media portrays only the negative side.

Interestingly, Deb and Carolyn take somewhat of an opposite stance. While generally sharing the others' attitude, they also intimate that perhaps rappers should be doing more than simply describing their violent situations:

> Carolyn: A lot of the time, they're just talking about what they grew up doing. But all the energy that they spend on their albums and videos talking about killing and shooting, They could spend time trying o change the situation. Because obviously they're not happy about it.
> I: Oh, so they just describe it?
> Deb: Right. They just talk about it.I don't know. Maybe they could do something about it. Some of them probably do. But most of the gangster rappers don't.

When asked if violent lyrics can influence a person's outlook and/or behaviour, only one of them categorically admits that it can. Many students point out that it is really contingent on the type of rap, the personality listening to it, and/or the social circumstance. For instance, Russell perceives the issue of causal influence as a case of selective violence, namely political. That is to say, he feels that rap may make a person feel and perhaps act more violently; but usually it is more toward agents of Black injustice and oppression:

> I: What kind of mood does this song arouse in you?
> Russell: I'm angry. Listening to P.E. always gets me angry.
> I: Does PE just make you you do something or just make you feel angry or think a certain way?
> Russell: I think to do something too. Like the song says, we need to keep all those negative things out of the community: the guns, the drugs, and all that stuff.There's something about rap music that can make you violent. But it's not just against anyone, it's a specific person.
> I: Like whom?
> Russell: The government. A sell out. A cop can be one. Like when cops come up to me at the mall and start asking me all these stupid questions, sometimes I feel like hurting them. Such things are so unnecessary.

Denise claims that while rap may not directly influence behaviour, it does or could function somewhere in between an unstable individual and his/her negative social circumstance:

> I: Do you think rap causes or can influence a violent tendencies in a person?
> Denise: I think not directly. But it does glorify or reinforces something that is negative. . . I think if someone was going to kill another person, a rap song wouldn't stop nor would it cause them. It might have the potential for you to want to listen to it. But if someone was about to do something like that, then rap wouldn't matter.

Furthermore, Denise intimates that political or lyrically conscious rappers are more likely to have an impact on one's outlook or behaviour:

> I: What about the responsibility by an artist not to produce this violent message and image?
> Denise: I think yes they do have a responsibility not produce it; and even more so with the more comprehensible and clear-lyric based rappers.
> I: Why them?
> Denise: Because with some hard core, like Public Enemy, lyrics are very important to them. There's a greater chance that kind of rap will leave an impression on you. I'm not saying it will, but it could.

Doug also alludes to this limited catalytic role that rap may play. However, he adds that the music is not part of a premeditated process of violence. In the end, he astutely posits that powerful authorities intentionally hype the violence to either censor or sell rap:

> I: Can rap make a person violently inclined?
> Doug: I think it can become a part of you. I think you can be driving a car and get pissed off and you're about to shoot someone, so you put on a tape, say, Onyx, to get your anger coming closer.But you're not thinking, "yeah, I'm going to put on this tape and I'm gonna get pumped. You see, the people who are trying to oppress rap are purposely listening to the music and they're
> saying, "this is what they're doing: they're shooting up people and young kids are copying them. I know what they're doing [emphatically]. But that's not what it's like. . . and in a sense, whoever's in power is also making all the controversy in order to make it sell.

Some students imply that racism underlies the drive for censorship of hard core rap. They wonder why other forms of marginal music and violent movies do not receive the same harsh treatment as rap:

> I: Does rap cause violence?
> Floyd: No! No! No! If rap caused violence, then you know how much violence would exist? Think about how many people listen to rap, and not just Black people. If everyone was influenced by rap, like everyone thinks, there would be a lot more violence. You can't blame it[rap]. And look at heavy metal, and all those shoot and rip 'em up movies like Terminator and all that stuff. I don't see them raising a fuss over that.
>
> I: So what about the public outcry that rap is causing violence?
> Keith: I've never seen rap cause violence at a hall party or anything. But I always hear people say crap like that, how they want to censor it.
> I: Who says that?
> Keith: I'd say it's more White people.
> I: Why do you think that?
> Keith: Because it[rap] has to do with Black people.

Other students speak to the primary role symbolic mediation plays in the issue of rap and causal behaviour. Reggie asserts that many people choose to imitate tough rappers because it is 'cool':

> I: Do you think rap influences people to maybe do something violent?
> Reggie: It can. Like NWA makes you feel like you gotta be bad. Even when you listen to the lyrics, it makes you feel all rough after. People want to be so cool. They want to be somebody else.

Deb and Carolyn also think that listeners frequently incorporate the violence and severity as a type of attitudinal style. Moreover, they imply that this imitation, particularly in Canada, borders on comical hypocrisy:

> Deb: Like some people you see are trying to act all hard like rappers. It's so funny. Up here they come off like I'm a gangster, walking around like they're so cool, so hard.

> Carolyn: Yeah, talking about their hard times when they're living in a two thousand square foot house.

Marcus reflects a similar sentiment. He also alludes to a relationship between degree of identification and familiarity with the music and the level and nature of imitation:

> Marcus: I think if you have been listening to rap for a long time, it can have an effect on you. You see rappers are role models. Whatever they say or do, most of the people will go by it. It's like if someone that is important to them is telling the same message that they think is right, then they'll listen.I've seen it among Black people. Like they have this walk and attitude, it's more rough and superior to anybody else. It's like they have to stand out.
> I: Where do they get that from?
> Mark: I think they get it from the music.

Many students argue that the music is only going to have an influence if a person consciously or unconsciously lets it. Doug clearly illuminates this major theme:

> I: Have you ever had a change in outlook because of rap, either good or bad?
> Doug: Yeah. Like for example when I was younger I got myself in a lot of trouble. And that was at the time when NWA first came out: "Comin' straight outta Compton, crazy motherfuckin' name of Ice Cube". I can't believe I used to like that hard core gangster shit-probably because I looked up to it. I was stupid. I remember trying to run away from the cops and pretending like I was rough, you know? And I feel some kids act that way because they want to act hard core. There are people like that out there. The music kind of influences them. But they probably won't admit it. They'll say, "what are you talking about?" But subconsciously it[the music] could. It depends on how old the person is. I think if it was a little kid, maybe. With adults, I think I have a choice.
> I: You mean being more critical?
> Doug: Yeah. Even at 16, you have two blinking lights. You have that little messenger that tells you.

Deb and Carolyn not only share this view of the importance of critical autonomy, they also introduce the notion that deeper primary factors may be at work in shaping violent behaviour:

> I: Do you think that because there is so much violence in hard core, that maybe people will take it and start acting violently?
> Deb: Not all people. Lots of people think that rap is the cause of all the violence between young people today. That's not true. There's other things like movies and television and even other kinds of music, like heavy metal for instance.
> Carolyn: And some people are influenced so easily and they're like not smart enough to make their own decision. They listen to whatever, see

what they see and go out and do it. But it starts with the parents, and kids like that need guidance.
I: So does rap influences people who are perhaps not thinking for themselves.
Carolyn: Definitely! That's the people it influences the most because they don't have their own minds.

It seems that most of the students blame deeper societal forces for the violence in society:

I: Well, does rap have a bad influence on young people?
Darrell: No. Because the anger is there from before. It's how you're treated.
Trish: I don't think it does either. You can't start a fire without a spark. If there was no spark before it, then I don't think you can start a fire. Like violence is caused by different disputes by people. Rap is only music.
I: So would you say there is something beneath rap.
Trish: Well, yeah.
I: Do you agree, Darrell?
Darrell: Yeah.
Monica: You can't put something there that isn't already in the mind.I mean there's that Jeffrey Dalmers guy. He's bad and he never listened to rap. I think it has more with the way you are treated, especially when you are a kid.

But perhaps nowhere is this shared belief in the primacy of structure more clearly articulated than in the following lucid passage:

Floyd: Society is changing. If you watched tv back in the 50s and saw all the sex and violence that doesn't mean nothing to us today, hey would say, "oh, my god!"
I: So are you implying that today's society is more violent?
Bruce: More vulgar too, man.
I: Is that good or bad?
Bruce: Bad!
Floyd: You can't really say it's bad, because that's the way we are. This is how we've grown up in this generation. We see what's out there. There's no way you can compare us to the 50s.
I: Yeah. But is it better now?
Bruce: It's worse.
Floyd: It's worse. But we don't really feel that it's worse. We live now and we will always live this way.
Cindy: Because the violence on tv makes us numb.
I: Can rap make you numb too?
Cindy: It's different when you see it.
I: But what about rap videos?
Cindy: But in movies you see gore and brains flying out. And the 6:00 news can be just as bad, and they're showing stuff that is real, you know?
I: So whose responsibility is it for putting all this violence out there-the artist or society?
All: It's demand.

> I: But what do you want to see?
> Floyd: We don't want to see something that is fabricated, not true.
> Cindy: But because we have seen so much violence on tv, we have been programmed to think that way-to like it.

In short, the group perceives violence in rap differently. They denounce certain rappers for using violence to sell either records or cover up a lack of talent. In fact, many students demonstrate a keen ability to distinguish between real rappers and those that are 'frontin' or faking it. However, as is the case with profanity, the students accept the depictions of violence when they perceive them to be an authentic part of a rapper's life. In the their view, nothing precedes or overrides the notion of authenticity or staying real to the streets. Some students point to the positive role that these depictions serve in illuminating or exposing an otherwise ill-informed public about the perils of ghetto life. Moreover, they add that it is wrong to perceive all rap as violent. In their view, White authorities advance this sweeping generalization either as a ploy to ban rap or to increase record sales.

As for the issue of whether rap causes violent behaviour, the group shares three common attitudes. One, rap may have an intermediary influence, especially if the music has hard-hitting beats and lyrics. Many students reveal that this influence largely plays itself out as symbolic gestures. In other words, some rap fans internalize or imitate the violent images as an attitude of style and fashion. Thus a person may front a tough posture or certain look; but rarely does that person translate the violent themes into actual violence. Two, the degree to which the music may influence an individual toward violence depends largely on the person. In other words, the music can only influence a person if he/she lets it. Thus, as with the notion of authenticity, the group places a tremendous premium on critical autonomy. Three, and perhaps most important, the students do not blame rap for the perceived violence and degeneracy in youth. They persistently and passionately point to underlying structural factors as the objects of blame as well as contempt.

Misogyny is a third domain related to rap. Critics assert that hard core rap's degrading portrayal of women negatively influences the attitudes and behaviour of young people, especially male listeners. Interestingly, several female rappers, such as Queen Latifah, MC Lyte and Salt n' Peppa, are struggling to overcome the negative images and hype by advancing themes of female self respect, dignity and empowerment. Thus, rap's treatment of women harbours both a transformative and a reproductive potential. I therefore asked the students several general questions about women in rap to determine where the latter fit on this spectrum of possibility. Then I had them view and discuss a popular pro-women rap video called "Unity", by Queen Latifah. In this video, Queen Latifah casts women in situations of empowerment. In one situation, a group of boys sexually harass and degrade her on the street. Rather than passively submitting to the harassment, she stands up for herself by berating and even physically defending herself.

When asked what they thought of the portrayal of women in rap in general, most of students say women are put down too much. The following passages reflect typical complaints espoused by the sample:

> I: What do you think of the portrayal of women in rap?
> Denise: Honestly, I think it kind of sucks. Women are more portrayed in like skimpy clothes all the time and always waiting on the guys.
> Chantelle: I think it's terrible. Everyone in the music, even some of the women rappers, call themselves bitches. It's bad.
>
> Deb: Sometimes they go too far, talking about, 'oh yeah, I did this to that girl last night.' Certain things you don't need to hear.
> Carolyn: Yeah. And you can't just call me a bitch. It makes me mad how the guy rappers are just throwing it around like it's no big deal. It's so disrespectful.

Although these remarks convey a weighty conviction, one must not presume the students monolithically oppose the manner in which hard core represents women. In fact, they share a number of views that appear to defend or justify this representation.

First, several students, female as well as male, point out that they occasionally find the depictions to be very witty and humorous. Moreover, they contend that they know when a rapper is being serious or just being whimsical:

> Deb: But it really depends what frame of mind you're in at the time. I mean sometimes you may think it's pretty funny.
> I: What about all the graphic descriptions of sex in rap? How does it make you feel?
> Yvonne: Sometimes I think it's funny, you know? Like how they describe it, the words that they use can make you laugh.
>
> Reggie: Some of it is just pure fun. Like with Pharcyde, you can tell they're just having fun.

> I: Have you heard the whole tape? They call girls bitches a lot. At one point they even say something about going up a pussy with a fist.
> Reggie: That's just jokes. You can tell when they're just joking.I don't say it's always a good thing. But the style is so funny and entertaining. And I'm not gonna go out and say, 'yeah, I'm gonna put my fist up her'.

Second, many students accept the negative images because they perceive certain women to be like that. In their view, if women act like 'bitches', then they should be called as such:

> I: So what about the calls for censorship? Any of that justified?
> Russell: It's just a matter of understanding. And plus, some women don't like hearing that bitch shit. But, hey, if the shoe fits, wear it. Like these rappers have mothers and sisters and you can't be calling them bitches. They're talking about a certain type of woman: basically the sleazy type that likes to use people. . . Heck, I use the term. I call guys and girls bitches. It's an attitude. If you have an attitude of a bitch, and that's that stuck up or sleazy attitude, I'll call you a bitch. Sometimes the truth hurts.

Interestingly, contrary to what one might expect, male students are not the only ones expressing this opinion. Several female students share this view. In fact, some of the clearest and strongest arguments in defense of the music come from women. In their view, the music is not a problem because they do not perceive themselves as 'bitches' or 'hos'. The following passages illuminate this discriminating rationality:

> I: What do you think of the portrayal of woman in rap?
> Yvonne: Hey, I'm not a bitch. I'm not a 'ho'. And if the song's referring to that , then I guess you shouldn't be offended. Because if you aren't like that, then that shouldn't bother you. When they refer to that[bitches], it's the backstabbing girls; the rough girls, not the nice girls. And I'm not like that, so it doesn't bother me.
> I: So what you're saying is there are girls out there that legitimately deserve such a label?
> Yvonne: Right. There are girls out there that wait for rappers after a concert, you know. But sometimes I think it goes too far.

> Cindy: To me, I know I'm not a bitch by character. Like I am a bitch when I have to be. Ain't nothing wrong with that. And when they say 'ho', I know I'm not a ho. So it doesn't bother me.

Third, and in a related way, many students make a distinction between the situation 'up here' and 'the way it is down there'. That is, they appear to accommodate the negative portrayal of (Black)women in rap because that is how they perceive Black women to be in America. In contrast, the students, both male and female alike, perceive Black women in Canada in a much more favourable light. This cross-cultural cleavage is poignantly evident in the following passages:

> I: What do you think of the portrayal of women in rap?
> Yvonne: They mostly talk about bitches and 'hos'. To them that's not a woman. To them it's like a person who just wants the money. Because when I went down to the States, a lot of the girls there were like that. They have really bad attitudes. If you look at them the wrong way, they'll come up to you. And most of the time, they'll only go out with a guy who's got money or a car. Most of them(men) are poor, and they see women like that. And when they get into a high position, when they have all that money, then the women are coming after them. It's kind of showing they(rappers) have more power now.
> Before they would have to have a job and everything just to get a woman.
>
> Trish: Some of it I don't like. But down there, calling a girl a bitch is normal.
>
> I: What are your feelings about the portrayal of women in rap?
> Roger: They're put down too much, I think. But I guess, actually, we were talking about this in the library the other day. Women in States, Black women actually, are the ones being put down. And they bring this upon themselves.
> I: And it's different here?
> Roger: Yes. Because these guys came here from the states to play basketball, and said the girls here are much more respectable than girls there. They don't use their bodies for whatever they want.

Fourth, several students reveal that the use of the word 'bitch' does not necessarily signify enmity or division. Frequently, it can represent a mark of solidarity, playfulness, or intimacy among the people who belong to the same close-knit group. Reggie illuminates this point:

> I: What is it with all these references to bitches and hos in hard core?
> Reggie: Well, some girls even consider themselves bitches.
> I: Do you think such lyrics are having an impact on how guys treat girls?
> Reggie: Oh yeah! I've seen some of my friends go, 'shut up bitch'. But it's total voice too. It's the tone. Most of the time it's just playing, joking with your friends. Like I have this friend whose really close to his girlfriend and he calls her bitch all the time. And she just laughs.

The group offers a variety of interesting views on whether misogynist lyrics and images actually cause violent and degrading behaviour toward women. Some female students point to the music's capacity to either desensitize them or, on the contrary, manipulate their self-image into thinking they are 'bitches':

> I: How does the music make you feel?

> Denise: kind of insulting to think all men care about is your ass. Part of the problem is that I hear it so often, I think I've almost become immune to it.
>
> I: What do you think of the portrayal of women in rap?
> Chantelle: It's terrible. Everyone in the music, even the women rappers, call themselves bitches.
> I: But is this reference always a bad thing? Can't it be taken in a fun way, like between friends?
> Chantelle: It could. But now like I listen to music that has that word in it so much, that sometimes I think that I am, you know?.They use every little thing a woman does ad makes it seem bad. Your this or your that.

Many students, however, contend the misogynist themes can only influence a person if he/she lets it:

> I: So do you have a problem with the way women are portrayed in rap?
> Russell: No. I have no problem.
> I: What about the accusations that it makes young males treat women badly?
> Russell: Yeah, it's out there. But like I said, if you are a smart human being, you know that's wrong..Just because rappers call them bitches doesn't mean you should. . . You got to use your common sense.

Other students reveal people like to import and imitate the American gangster-bitch style because they perceive it as 'cool':

> I: What do you think about the all references to women being bitches and hos? Is it being played out, say at school?
> Marcus: Yeah. It happens a lot. I find people in Edmonton in general are wannabes'. They want to be like the people in the projects. But for the people in the projects, that's just the way it is.
> I: So are people in Edmonton copying the American ghetto scene?
> Marcus: Yeah. I'd say there is a lot of imitation.
>
> Doug: You see, some people get the anger and hype off it. And some of them be suckers and they just go out there and front and take it seriously. I see people all the time. There's a lot of bullshit going on.

But ultimately, most students blame deeper structural forces for the negative portrayal and treatment of women both in the music and in society, particularly the family and media:

> I: Are guys taking these lyrics and acting on them in a negative way?
> Yvonne: They do that. But mostly they just be putting up a front. . . It also has to do with your upbringing. If you saw your father abusing your mother, then you don't know what else to do, because you see it happening all the time.
>
> Trish: No. I think it has always been like that for women. Guys always put down women. No matter what colour you are.

> Keith: No I'm not really down with all that kind of stuff. But it's the society we live in, know what I mean? It's everywhere: look how they treat women on tv and in the movies. So naturally people are gonna think its ok.
>
> Roger: Yeah. But I think it started before that. Down there in the projects things are rough, like the drugs, no jobs, stuff like that. And the girls down there have attitudes. Now the guys here are trying to pick up the attitudes from the states.

Regarding the issue of pro-women rappers, the students share a number of positive remarks. First, in terms of salience, they all positively endorse pro-women rappers such as Queen Latifah. Deb and Carolyn typify this sentiment:

> I: Who was that?
> Both: Queen Latifah.
> I: What is she singing about here?
> Carolyn: She's talking about unity among Black men and women.
> I: Do you like that song?
> Both: Yeah!
> Deb: She's a strong women. She sticks up for women and has a great beat too.
> Carolyn: I like her and MC Lyte and people like that because it's the feminist sort of thing. They talk about how we should as women better ourselves and take care of men.
> I: Do you think her message is making a difference in how guys and girls may relate to each other?
> Carolyn: It might. Like she says, you have to have respect. You can't just be calling me a bitch. We need more rappers like her, because a lot of times men don't know how to act right towards a lady.

Some students intimate that the pro-women rap is actually having a positive effect on attitudes and behaviour:

> I: Do you know who sings that song?
> Yvonne: Yeah, Queen Latifah. That's a good song.
> I: Do you think pro-women rappers such as Queen Latifah are good for rap and women?
> Yvonne: Yeah. She portrays a strong Black woman. She helps to give women, especially Black women, some pride in themselves. It also gives them the message that we're not stupid, and how they should be treating us.

Moreover, it is not just females expressing this view. Reggie, for instance, acknowledges the music's influence on his behaviour and that of an unidentified female:

> I: What do you think about Queen Latifah?
> Reggie: Some women are feminists, some are rough.
> I: What is she?

> Reggie: A feminist-even her name, Queen.
> I: Is that good or bad?
> Reggie: She has a right to be because men are like, oh were the best".
> I: Do you think she is doing a good thing for women?
> Reggie: Yeah. Like the video. That guy is dissin' her and she disses him right back.
> I: Do you take her massage to heart?
> Reggie: I respect Black women now, right? Before it's like, you don't talk unless you be talked to.
> I: Are you finding girls sticking up for themselves more?
> Reggie: Yeah. What's her name, um, I can't remember, is like that totally.
> I: Where is she getting that from?
> Reggie: She's getting it from this. I mean all she listens to is rap. And you have to get it from somewhere. You can't just know things.

However, despite these positive remarks, it appears that rap's role in changing sexist behaviour is ultimately limited. That is to say, underlying determining factors, such as thinking for oneself, media, social circumstance, etc., prevent the actualization of pro-women messages.

For instance, though he acknowledges that the music does have a positive impact on outlook, Reggie still refers back to social circumstance and the value of staying real:

> I: So, do you agree, then, with Queen Latifah that this bitch shit has to go?
> Reggie: It depends. If the girl is a bitch or a ho, then you should call her that.Why not call her what she is? Cos' there are girls like that. I seen them when I was in the States last summer.

Trish and Denise, similarly, point out that while Latifah's message may have a positive influence on the issue of gender, it is ultimately a deeper cultural matter:

> I: Do you think this kind of rap is having an impact on the way guys treat women?
> Trish: No. Well, I guess it could cos' she speaks out on it. But then again guys do that anyways. They're just brought up that way.
> I: With or without rap?
> Trish: Yeah.
>
> Denise: No. But I think that's partly due to my parents and the crowd I hang out with. I think for a lot of girls it's like, yeah, I don't have to be called a bitch. But it's not like you hear it and "tada!". I think if you relate to it and you are smart, you will get more out of it.

In short, the group generally disapproves of rap's portrayal of women. However, in no way is this disapproval absolute. Students, females as well as males, occasionally find the language and images to be witty and funny. Moreover, they tend to accept the depictions because they: 1) share certain perceptions with the rappers, such as that some women, particularly in the America, are "bitches", 2) adhere to an elaborate vernacular and social intra-group code that values ambiguous meanings, critical autonomy and telling it like it is', and 3) recognize the importance of context and mindstate in the reading of meaning.

In regards to the question of whether the misogynist and pro-women lyrics shape attitudes and behaviour, participant responses are again contingent on a variety of common factors. Some female students complain that the derogatory and violent language desensitizes and degrades a female's self-image. Other students criticize people for imitating a gangster-bitch' style or attitude that is decidedly American. On the other hand, many students defend rap. They assert that rap's role in influencing sexist behaviour is an intermediary one at best. Moreover, they blame the individual or deeper structural factors for any misogynist behaviour being expressed by young males. The group widely supports and acknowledges the significance of pro-women messages. However, though they assert that the music can and is having a positive influence, in the last instance it depends on the student's critical frame of mind, affinity with the music, and structural background.

Religion is a fourth domain of controversy. KRS-1, Paris, Brand Nubians, and other popular conscious rappers critically reject the historical relationship between Black Americans and Christianity. Instead, they endorse the doctrines of the Black Panther Party and Nation of Islam. Both groups are radically pro-Black. Some of their central themes include struggling for Black self-determination and unity, celebrating Black history and actively confronting institutional oppressors. During the interviews I played two songs: "The Real Holy Place" by KRS-1 and "Anti-Nigger Machine" by Public Enemy. Both songs embrace or reflect the tenets of the Nation and are particularly critical of Christianity. I then explore the degree to which the group understands and supports these two songs. Several interesting themes emerge from the data.

First, the entire group grasps clearly the meaning of both songs. This is no small accomplishment, especially in regard to the song 'The Real Holy Place". Its lyrics are quite sophisticated and abstract. The students aptly explain that what KRS-1 means by the title is that the 'real holy place' is in each person's mind and heart, not the Church. They also pick up on other central messages such as the need to question accepted truths and problematic history of Christianity. The following excerpts illustrate this firm and profound understanding:

> I: Ok. Who sings that?
> Deb: BDP.
> I: How much of that song did you understand?
> Carolyn: I understood all of it.
> I: What's he rapping about here?
> Carolyn: He's asking why do we trust so much in the bible when we don't know if everything in it is true or not. Like we're only being Christians because our slavemasters were Christians.
> Deb: Yeah. And that god is in your mind and not a book.I think he thinks that you shouldn't have to have a religion to be religious.
>
> Trish: KRS-1
> I: Right. Now in this song, he refers to 'they' a lot. Who might 'they' be?
> Trish: Christians. White Christians. The teachers! The preachers! Because they aren't all saintly themselves.
> I: What does he mean by 'if your slavemaster wasn't a Christian, you wouldn't be a Christian'?
> Trish: That's exactly what I was saying. The reason we were Christians is because our slavemasters forced their religion on us. And we might not be Christians right now if they hadn't. To me Christianity is so corrupt. It's not based on equality to me. In subtle ways they make you think White men look superior.
> Bruce: Here's the problem I have: they say Jesus is White, but they don't really know.
> I: So how would you sum up the message or messages in this song?
> Trish: Maybe not believe in what is taught. Ask yourself questions about what is the norm, what they say is true.
> Bruce: Do your own study. Like if you go to church, what he says is you should go and do some in depth study on your own.
>
> Denise: I'm not exactly sure. What distracted my attention was all the whips in the background. But I think it was BDP.
> I: Right. Now how would you classify him?
> Denise: Definitely not dance. I'd say political, like being preached at.
> I: What message if any did you get from the song?
> Denise: Discontent. Sort of questioning or challenging things that were given. He kind of picked a controversial topic: the bible. From what I understand you're supposed to take the bible as it is. Not question it. He says read between the lines. Like he says, Jesus was a revolutionary- they don't tell you that.

Second, the students are unmistakably sceptical and negative toward the Church. This scrutiny is particularly apparent in our discussion of Public Enemy's song, "Anti-Nigger Machine":

> I: In that song we just heard, Public Enemy raps that, and I quote, both the church and the liquor store are keeping us poor, keeping us down'.

> I can understand about the liquor store, but how does the Church contribute to this oppression?
> Russell: I think what they're saying is that a lot of Black people are brainwashed when it comes to the church. I hate to bring down the Church, but it deceives you. You see, Christianity was brought to us by the White man. And Jesus was a Hebrew, and they got him now with blue eyes. And the way we think that the superhuman being is White also has a lot to do with Christianity. So there's a lot of deceit to it.
>
> Roger: Funny thing is we pick up on the same lines. With that, I think what they're getting at is that both the church and the liquor store take the willpower, and money, away from Blacks.
>
> Yvonne: Um, how can I say this? Both aren't helping. Like the church, they go there but they're still in poverty, and after all these years. And it's the same with the liquor store. They go there for their problems, just like they go to church. But they aren't going to find solutions there either.

Third, the songs appear to stir a fascinating sense of inquiry, doubt and wonder in its listeners. Not only does every respondent raise this point, they also all thoroughly endorse it as one of rap's most positive qualities. The following passages clearly illustrate this:

> I: So what is this song about?
> Cindy: It's about questioning what people believe is true.
> Bruce: Yeah. Looking beneath the false fronts. KRS-1 teaches you to look what's behind. Like he says, they have us thinking Jesus has blond hair and blues eyes.
> Floyd: He's saying when you follow religion, you don't follow it blindly.
>
> Doug: I find in the music it's kind of different because some people can listen to music and I don't think they're actually learning. I think that they're being told something, and it's up to them to find out for themselves whether they believe it or not. Like with me, I'm not gonna listen to what KRS-1 says about the Bible and then say that's true. I'd rather go find out for myself; I don't think they[people] say, 'oh, yeah, did you know that Black people did this great or that?'. And someone will say, oh where did you hear that? And they'll say, I heard it on this tape from KRS-1. It doesn't sound legit. I don't think anybody gets a frame of mind from it.
> I: What do they get?
> Doug: They'll probably refer from hearing it and want to go check it out.
> I: Do you think that is a good thing?
> Doug: Hell, yeah. That's positive. It gets people thinking and gives them a positive outlook on being Black and seeing how things work.
>
> Roger: I don't think it's a matter of agreeing or disagreing with the song. I just think it asks you to see life from a different point of view.
> I: So does the music then change how you look at things?
> Roger: As a matter of fact it just did. I was just thinking when I was listening to this song.

> I: Really? What were you thinking about?
> Roger: Like how Christianity isn't really ours. It's like a front.
> I: Do many other rappers get you thinking like this?
> Roger: Yeah. That's what most of the political or hard core rappers try to do: to always ask questions, to question the truth.It's about fighting back against the norm, against conformity.
>
> Denise: I'm not sure that hard core is really about creating an understanding.What it does is maybe give you the curiosity to look, and ask what's going on here? Is this true? Like when I heard this song by BDP, I wondered how much of what he says is real and legitimate or just excuses.

Though the group appears to endorse these two songs, they rarely express complete rejection of religion per se. This is the result of two factors which constitute a fourth important theme. First, as Carolyn mentions above, many the students value religion, or more accurately, immanent spirituality, while rejecting traditional means by which to observe and celebrate it. The following remarks show this:

> I: KRS-1 says 'keep that bible on the shelf, stop reading from a dead book for a live god'; what do you think about that?
> Roger: Yeah, I think a live god is a self-being
> I: A self-being?
> Roger: Yeah. It's in your mind. You are your own god, and I guess that's what he means by the real holy place is mental.
>
> I: What about the statement that if your slavemaster wasn't a Christian, you wouldn't be a Christian?
> Bruce: That's kind of true because the bible gives us certain information.
> Cindy: And how do you know that it is the right information?
> Floyd: But all people need something to believe in. And you never mess with someone's religion because that's everything to someone. But I think you have to follow your religion, not all the other people.
> Bruce: Yeah, God, that's who we should be focussing on.
> Floyd: Right. I don't go to church, but that doesn't mean I'm not religious or Christian. It's up to you. You have to look inside yourself.

The second factor is that structure, especially family, influences the way in which the group receives and processes the music. That is, the data show clearly a fascinating tension or struggle over what the students have been traditionally taught by their parents to be right and true regarding Christianity and what the music is advancing. The following comments capture this tension:

> I: Do you agree with his message about Christianity?

> Chantelle: I go to church. My parents do. That's why when he[KRS-1] says if your slavemaster wasn't a Christian you wouldn't be a Christian- but you see, you kind of have to.
>
> Marcus: I think it's true, because if my mother didn't believe it, I wouldn't believe it.
> I: How would they react to this song?
> Marcus: I don't think they'd accept it. They think that they are reading from the right book, the 'good book'. So you see. What can you do?
>
> Carolyn: Sort of. Even before really getting into rap, I had my doubts about the Bible. Because it seems sort of, I don't know, my family believes strongly in the bible but I have my doubts. And KRS-1 is right, you don't have to go to church to believe in god.But then the thing is, if you don't believe in the bible, do you believe in Christ? Like I wonder if it actually happened? Or I don't know. I just have a lot of doubt.
>
> Deb: A little bit. But I believe in god. That's the way I was raised. And like, as many questions as there are, it's whether you have faith and what you have been told. But when I hear KRS-1 or someone like that it makes me wonder if what I have been told is true. It makes me wonder.

In short, the sample expresses a surprisingly radical attitude toward the origin and agenda of religion. Not only does the sample understand the meaning of the two songs, they widely endorse and somewhat influenced by them. For instance, many students attack Christianity as an agent of White deception and domination. They also demonstrate a passionate appreciation for spirituality and a propensity for inquiry and questioning. But, on the other hand, a tension or struggle exists between their emerging radical views and structural forces, namely traditional parental values and their own underdeveloped critical skills.

Drugs make up the final domain of controversy. Drugs are definitely not new to the music business. The depiction and often glorification of drugs has been a dominant theme in popular music since the 60s. Other pop genres tend to convey their messages in an irregular and surreptitious fashion. But hard core rappers usually talk openly and frequently about drugs. Therefore I wanted to find out what my research group thinks of the portrayal of drugs in rap and whether this portrayal tempts them to indulge in its use.

Many students acknowledge the prevalence of drugs in hard core. But they are rather indifferent and casual about it, neither applauding nor condemning its use Russell and Carolyn highlight this rather ambivalent, languid attitude toward drugs:

> I: What about the portrayal of drugs in rap?
> Carolyn: Yeah. They talk about smoking blunts a lot. I don't know, it's not that big of a deal, really.
>
> Russell: Oh yeah. it's there. You have Dr. Dre, Redman, Snoop. But there's nothing wrong with the casual use of drugs.

Denise not only shares this attitude but reveals a potential reason behind it, namely that she perceives drug use as a natural part of a rapper's culture:

> I: What about the portrayal of drugs in rap?
> Denise: Oh yeah, it's there. But really only in the more recent stuff. It's not like they glorify it. They just say that they do it. It's what they do. They grew up around it.

There is an interesting irony surrounding this issue of drugs in rap. On the one hand, most of the group demonstrate an almost casual acceptance of the portrayal of drugs in rap; but on the other hand, they completely reject taking drugs themselves. The following passages capture this irony:

> I: So do rappers refer to drugs a lot?
> Keith: Oh yeah. They rap about it. And I'm sure they do it, but I don't know. But I don't do drugs. None of my friends do drugs.
>
> Marcus: It's there. They talk about lighting up and how it makes them feel good. But personally I don't think it's right.
>
> Yvonne: Yeah, they sing about it. As for me, no, I'd never try it.

Some students assert that the sheer frequency of drug references in the music tempts a person to want to try it:

> I: What about drugs in rap?
> Chantelle: It's there and what they usually say about it is good, like Dre's song The Chronic(a type of potent marijuana).
> I: What do you think about that?
> Chantelle: If I were a person who never heard rap before, and I were to put that song on, I'd want to try drugs.
> I: Is that good or bad?
> Chantelle: It's awful. But they talk about it so much, it makes you very curious.
> I: Do they rap about drugs a lot?
> Reggie: Yeah, Cypress Hill, Redman(his name refers to another type of potent pot). A lot of them do, and it kind of makes you want to try it. Because if these guys are always talking about it, you kind of want to see for yourself.

Other students, however, argue that the music is only a direct influence on people who are not thinking for themselves or are trying to gain status and style via imitation:

> I: Do you think all the talk about drugs maybe tempts young people to want to try it?
> Russell: No. If you're gonna smoke, you're gonna smoke. It's up to you.
>
> Carolyn: It depends. Again, it's like those people who are not thinking for themselves. They are not going to realize that it's just music.They're going to say, 'they did it so I have to, too'.
>
> Keith: No. I don't think it's a good thing. Of course there are a lot of wannabes.

In short, students recognize that rappers frequently refer favourably to drug use. But they do not appear to have a major problem with it. In fact, they are somewhat casual about the whole issue. As for whether the music influences behaviour, a strong irony emerges. That is, on the one hand, the students accept casually the music's abundant drug references; on the other hand, most of them abstain from personal use. For them, anyone tempted by the music to take drugs is either not thinking or simply trying to be 'cool'.

Rap: Domains of Resistance

The next three domains speak directly to the issue of resistance. That is, they explore the nature and degree to which the students use/perceive rap as a language of critique and possibility.

The first domain is rap and general disposition. The intent behind this domain is to develop an understanding of the students general perceptions and attitudes toward life. I asked the group questions about their definition of 'success', attitude toward schooling, and perception of the future. The assumption being, if they view the present and future in a relatively favourable light, then there is little room for radical possibility.

At first glance, the endorsement of school and conventional success goals appears universal among the group:

> I: What comes to mind when I say the word 'success'?
> Bruce: Money. A good job.
> Floyd: Same for me.
> I: What about school?
> Floyd: Good marks.

> I: Ok. But what about in terms of being important to you?
> Floyd: School is very important.
> I: Why?
> Floyd: You can't do anything without school. It's a number one priority.
> Bruce: It's a key to success.
>
> Darrell: Money is important.
> Trish: . . . and education.
> I: What do you think of school, is it important?
> Darrell: Yup. You need education for working in the world.
> Trish: I think education is important too. The more education you get, the better. You can function better in society with the more education you have.
> I: What do you mean by function better?
> Trish: Like in having a career, supporting yourself, stuff like that.

However, the students value more than just 'getting an education and a good paying job'. Frequently they refer to the underlying importance of non-material values such as spiritual development and wisdom. Such awareness is important for two reasons. First, it shows a deeper side of youth that, arguably, many adults overlook or underappreciate. That is, when given the opportunity, these students express an impressive degree of intellectual maturity. Second, it suggests that perhaps the students are not as thickly attached to conventional goals as perhaps first thought The following passages reveal their multi-dimensional values structure:

> I: What comes when I mention the word success to you?
> Deb: Happiness, power, money, friends.
> I: Anything you want to add, Carolyn?
> Carolyn: Inner satisfaction. Like some people think it's successful to have a lot of money. But then, there's a lot of people with money and they're miserable. So obviously they haven't achieved full success. So spiritually, not just materially, you should be successful.
>
> Monica: To me success means a career, family, individual success, at peace with yourself. You have no inner conflict . All your goals have been reached. Knowledge, wisdom, that stuff.
>
> Yvonne: Success is when you accomplish what you want.
> I: What would you like to accomplish?
> Yvonne: If I succeed with what I want to do, or find someone, like a spouse or a good friend.
> I: What comes to mind when I say the word money?
> Yvonne: Power, or an easier way of life.
> I: Is money the most important thing in life, then?
> Yvonne: No, well, it's important. But if you're not happy, then it doesn't really matter. Happiness has got to come from within. It's something you feel inside.

Probing more deeply into the respondents' perceptions/attitudes toward school reinforces this notion of questionable attachment to conventional norms. For example, Marcus admits his dislike of school but feels he has to attend. His submission appears to be driven by an implied faith in the old maxim that education equals jobs. We will see this faith surface again a later on:

> I: Well, do you like school?
> Marcus: If I had a choice, I wouldn't go. But there's no other choice. What are you gonna be in today's world if you don't go to school?

Yvonne and Monica also reflect this sense of coerced endorsement and dislike of school. It seems that a state of reification underlies their reluctant submission to conventional norms such as school. For instance, Monica, for example, does not want to 'think' about whether she likes school or not, she just takes for granted that it is something she has to do:

> I: Do you like school?
> Monica: Yup, well, I don't really look at school as liking or hating it. I look at it as a job, something I have to do and should do. I don't want to start labelling like I hate it because then I won't enjoy coming to school.
>
> Yvonne: Yeah. Hm. Well, it's alright. I get to see my friends. The work is kind of hard. It can be boring too. It's only interesting if a lot of your friends are there. But if I had a choice not to go, I'd still go to school because it's what I need.

Many political rappers (Public Enemy, KRS-1, X-Clan, etc.,) assert that formal schooling is racist and biased in its presentation of history. Thus I felt it was important to explore whether the group is aware of such assertions; and if so, what are they doing with this awareness?

The data suggest that the group relates strongly to the music's views on school. Many students, for instance, express deep dissatisfaction with the formal curriculum. The following passage reflects this resentment:

> I: How do teachers and other students react to rap in school?
> Darrell: They think it's disturbing.
> I: How so?
> Darrell: Disturbing the peace.
> Trish: It's more like they don't understand the underlying meaning And they don't like the cursing. I can understand that.
> I: Do you think political rap would be good in the curriculum?
> Trish: I'll tell you what would be good in the curriculum, some Black history[emphatically].

> Darrell: Exactly! If you look in the Social books right now, they may have a paragraph on Blacks, and the picture will be some starving Ethiopian. Then the other 200 pages will be on the White community.
> I: Do any rappers ever address this perceived problem?
> Darrell: Lots. PE, Tupac...
> Trish: KRS-1 is really big on it. Songs like 'You Must Learn'.

In another interview, a respondent not only echoes this dissatisfaction, but also alleges that some teachers and counsellors.are racist:

> I: Do rappers talk about the importance of school?
> Yvonne: Oh yeah. People like KRS-1, PE. But with them, they are usually mad about it, saying that we don't learn about Black history and stuff that's really important.
> I: Do you think what you study is important?
> Yvonne: Some things. But it's true what they[rappers] say. They do deny Black studies. They don't even talk about Black history month. And sometimes I felt some of my teachers were racist towards me. Because I was in all my right courses, and just because I was Black, they'd expect me to be bad. And when I did get a bad mark, they'd put like 'good job' when I know it wasn't. You have to prove yourself more. And a lot of counsellors, especially last year, are racist. And they're outwards with it too. It's like they're always watching us and are more tough on us than any other student.

When asked how they became critically aware of the problems in education, beside their own self-discovery, the students typically point to parents, Black-conscious literature and rap music as key influences. Deb and Carolyn explain:

> Carolyn: I've been aware of it[lack of Black studies] since I started school.
> Deb: Me, too. When I was real little my parents talked to me about it.
> Carolyn: You also find out about it from reading certain material. Stuff that has a Black focus.
> I: Do any rappers talk about it?
> Carolyn: KRS-1 does.You can learn a lot from him. Like he tells you about some of the contributions that Blacks have made that textbooks don't talk about.
> Deb: Yeah. He tells kids things that maybe they don't realize. And if they hear his songs they might ask, "why isn't this being done?"

Some students appear to be even acting on this heightened critical awareness. For instance, Bruce discusses how confronted a teacher about lack of Black studies in the curriculum:

> I: How does it make you feel to hear rappers talking about this problem?
> Bruce: Oh, you can relate to it. It makes you feel good because music is a big influence, right? So people hear it and it teaches you. Like BDP says, they don't tell you that the first university was in Africa.

> I: Have you ever confronted your teachers about it?
> Bruce: Well, as a matter of fact, last week in Social we were talking about imperialism and Britain. And I wanted to show them the textbook and talk about the downside for the Black man. I told my teacher about that. I said, can't we see any of the good points and learn about Africa?' And he said,'no, we don't learn about that in the education system, no time.

Several students comment on the ironic fact that this neglect of Black studies occurs in what is supposedly a multicultural society:

> Russell: Like this is supposed to be a multicultural society, know what I mean? But basically all we learn is European history. And it gets to me. I'd like to learn something about South America or something. I'm sick of all this European stuff.

> Yvonne: I [would] like to see more cultural aspects with everyone. Like last year I can remember learning about the Europeans and the Boer War. But I think they need to show it from all sides. Sometimes I think they just teach you what they want to teach you, one opinion, one view.

Three important themes emerge from the data regarding the group's perceptions of the future. One, the students inadvertently refer to the future either on a personal or global level, but fails to consider the two are synonymously interconnected. Two, most of the students are pessimistic about the future in the broader sense. Three, there is a relationship between personal outlook and gender. That is, unlike their male counterparts, most of the female students perceive their own future in a much brighter light than they do the bigger picture.

The following lucid passage captures the essence of this contradictory attitude so typical of the female students. It also demonstrates their proverbial faith in education as a 'meal ticket' to future successes:

> I: What do you think of the future?
> Carolyn: I think I have a pretty bright future because I can afford to go away to school. So I won't be limited.
> I: Limited in terms of getting a job?
> Carolyn: Yeah. Although now it looks kind of bad. Like right now my sister is in university and it doesn't look good for her.
> Deb: I also think my future is really good. I know I have a lot to overcome: I'm Black and I'm also a woman. But I think it's gonna be good.
> Carolyn: The thing that worries me isn't personal. But like violence and crime and stuff like that.
> I: In Canada?
> Carolyn: Everywhere! All the wars and starvation.
> I: So do you think the future in terms of the world is going to get worse, better or the same?

> Carolyn: I'm wondering how much worse it's going to get before it gets better. Because everything has to get worse before it can get better. And it seems pretty bad right now.
> Deb: Exactly. Like when you look at places like LA where people don't have freedom of speech. You can't really think how much worse it's going to get. Are we going to have the whole world at war before we see that we are just killing everybody off. It's hard to think if it will ever get better.
> I: Do you think you can personally make a positive difference?
> Deb: I want o think that I can. It's like if I try hard enough I can change one person and then that he/she can change another person.

As for the males, their characteristic ambivalence and pessimism toward the future, both personally and in terms of the bigger picture, is evident in the following passages:

> I: How's the future look to you?
> Keith: The future's kind of deep. Like I can't really answer that question because you never know what's gonna happen.
> I: Do you think you can get any job you want?
> Keith: I doubt that very much. It's just whatever comes, I guess.
> Marcus: The future doesn't look too good for me. It doesn't look good for people in general.
> I: What worries you?
> Marcus: That people will be living on the street. Unemployment, you know? Not enough educated people. Competition is getting so hard these days.
>
> Darrell: I just hope I'm successful.
> I: In terms of a job?
> Darrell: Yeah. I just hope there's jobs out there when I'm done. Because on the news it's like you go to university and you can't even find a job! And it's not just about me, you know. All the homeless people and stuff like that. It's getting crazy, man.

To sum up, at first glance the students appear to endorse strongly formal schooling and conventional indices of success, such as being rich, having prestige and power, and a good career. However, a closer look reveals they may perceive conventional norms as not just secondary but at times antithetical to their true underlying needs, interests and values. With respect to their perception of the future, three significant themes emerge. First, the students, without any prompting, tend to make a subconscious distinction between their own personal future and future in terms of the bigger picture. Second, most of them are very pessimistic about the latter. Third, gender plays a key role in this distinction. That is to say, while most of the students share an ambivalent and/or sharply negative attitude toward the future of the planet, an interesting contradiction emerges with the females: in that all but one perceives their own destiny to be quite positive.

Rap and Black self-concept constitutes the second domain of resistance. Two opposing arguments characterize the domain of rap and Black self- concept. Critics argue that rap's prolific use of the word 'nigger' and graphic depictions of Black on Black violence contribute to an already weak and depraved sense of self among Black youth. Proponents, meanwhile, counter that rap, particularly Afrocentric-conscious rap, does not corrode but rather rebuilds and reasserts Black self-pride and esteem. Both arguments relate strongly to my main research question.in that the former undermines while the latter reinforces a language of possibility. For example, a group mired in self-denigration and dissonance is more likely to be participating in instead of resisting their own domination. Thus I wanted to find out where the group stands regarding this important issue of Black self-concept and rap music. In other words, is rap helping them to believe in themselves, ie. to empower them to take control of their lives? Three questions guide this inquiry: (1) how do *they* perceive themselves as Black Canadians? (2) what do they think about the prevalent use of the term 'nigger' in rap? and(3) do they see rap's general portrayal of the Black image as a positive influence on self-image?

The first question produced a fascinating dichotomy.in that the students unwittingly distinguish between their own personal state and that of the broader Black community or collective. That is, on the one hand, their remarks and demeanour suggest a reasonably strong and confident self-concept. But on the other hand, admonishment, alienation and even denigration punctuates their perceptions of the group. Some students are surprisingly candid in their criticism. Russell, for instance, views himself as 'living right' but lashes out at some Blacks for lacking fortitude, depth, and integrity:

> Russell: Whether you believe it or not, we're kind of a messed up race.
> I: Where do you place the responsibility for being this way? Is it with the government and the way things are in society or is it with Blacks themselves or perhaps a mixture of the two?
> Russell: It's a mixture of everything. Like in the States, the system is designed to keep you down. But I also think a lot of Blacks don't like to see other Blacks achieve. They try to keep you down, there's a lot of jealousy. . . And a lot of Blacks in this city are ignorant. They don't know what's going on.
> I: Maybe the culture here doesn't demand such awareness?

> Russell: Hey man, no matter where you are, we're always going to be Black. People think that being Black is all about wearing boots, the big clothes, walking around with the limp and stuff. But that's not what it's about.
> I: What is it about?
> Russell: It's how you see things and how you carry and express yourself. It's about livin' right. You can't be frontin or sellin' Black people out.
> I: Do you think you are living right'.
> Russell: Yeah. I try to.

Other students are not so bitingly critical; nevertheless, their remarks still reveal this qualitative difference between how they see themselves as opposed to the group. In the following passage, for example, Bruce, Floyd and Cindy seem to exude the very qualities that they perceive the Black collective to be without, namely initiative, competence and (self) respect:

> Bruce: Before the Japanese became strong, in the States the Whites were considered the smartest. But once Japan educated themselves and became really advanced, and they came down here, when they apply for a job now, they're trusted and respected. It's like they know what they're doing. They built up a good reputation. And I feel that's what Black people should do.
> Cindy: But Japan 'could' make themselves better. They didn't have any foreigners over them. But other places like China, India, Africa all had invaders.
> Floyd:Imperialists(derisively), man.
> Bruce: We've all been wounded in one leg, I suppose, before the race even started.
> Floyd: But I think it's partially our fault. Like in the States, you can only say I was born in the ghetto for so long, or that it's the White people oppressing me and stopping me from going to school or getting a job. But using that argument all the time doesn't help. So I have to be strong and take measures into my own hands. Not necessarily violence, but education and stuff like that.

Regarding the second question, I first had the students explain what they thought the word 'nigger', as typically employed in rap, means. Only a few of the students take the word to mean something strictly derogatory or negative. Instead most of them assign some degree of positive value. For instance, Reggie and Marcus feel that it signifies staying 'Black', living true and being proud:

> I: What does Ice Cube mean by 'real nigga'?
> Reggie: Fake MCs. Rappers who are not what they seem to be. They're like, oh I shot people down, but if you check it out yourself, then it's like you know that they didn't.
> I: Do you see yourself as a real nigger?
> Reggie: Yeah, I don't fake anything.

> Marcus: I'd say true Black people. People who hang around with only Black people and fulfill the Black message and carry it out.
> I: What is the Black message?
> Marcus: I guess it's to stay Black, that your race is nothing but the best.

For Keith, the word has an ambiguous meaning, representing both a positive and a negative connotation:

> I think there are two types of niggers. I can call my friend a nigger; and then there's the 'NIGGER'(emphasized), like a stupid person. The sell-out. The Uncle Tom.

Doug's definition not only reflects this fraternal connotation, it also speaks to the notion of bricolage. For him, Black people subvert, reorganize and reinvest the word 'nigger' with positive meaning as a way to achieve and/or preserve Black identity, power and unity:

> I: So what is a 'real nigga'?
> Doug: That's hard to explain. I think he means that Black people relate to each other evenly. When a Black person says nigger, it's like taking a negative and putting it into a positive. It's very much an understanding thing.
> I: Do you use the term?
> Doug: Personally, I don't like to. Sometimes me and my friends use it when we're kidding around. But we find it as something that we didn't create. We consider it a word that means ignorant, so we don't use it in public, especially when there's White people around. Because then they may think, 'oh, it's alright to call them niggers, they call themselves niggers.'

Doug's acknowledgement here that the word 'nigger' is 'hard to explain' really sums up the group's passionate effort to define the word. One cannot help but feel that these students are struggling, both emotionally and intellectually, with what the word 'nigger' means.

After probing for definitions, I then asked the group about their views on rappers using the word 'nigger'. Again a deep sense of perplexity and emotional energy Marcus their responses. Overall, their attitude is mixed. Some students, for instance, tolerate its use in certain contexts:

> Reggie: My mom told me never to let no one call you a nigger. But then I really don't know what it means, because people always be telling me that nigger means you're oppressed. So if they're(rappers) calling each other nigger, then they must be oppressed. They're oppressed by everybody. . . it seems like you're oppressed all the time, so why not call yourself a nigger. If that's what it means.
> I: So would you be insulted if Keith called you a nigger?

> Reggie: No, cos' he's my friend, and he's Black too. But if I got into a fight with a White guy and he called me a nigger, I'd kill him.
>
> Russell: At one point I was totally against it because it was used like in the days of slavery. I don't know. One side of says it's not so good; but another side of me thinks it's ok.
> I: How do react when you hear it?
> Russell: It depends how you use it. I'm not 100% with it; but I can tolerate it.

Other students, though they acknowledge the importance of context, are clearly more assertive in their disapproval. Often their remarks are very interesting and insightful. Deb and Carolyn, for instance, imply that the excessive use of the word nigger by rappers is jeopardizing the Civil Rights gains made in the past. That is, they feel that White people may see the pervasive references as a green light to co-opt the term and use it indiscriminately as means of domination and or denigration. The following two passages illustrate this fear and concern:

> Deb: Just because they say it on a video doesn't mean that it's right. It's like Black people calling each other nigger.
> Carolyn: I don't think it's right to call Black people nigger.
> I: They say it a lot don't they?
> Carolyn: Sometimes I don't know what to make of it. Ok, Arrested Development uses it; but with them they mean Blacks that are oppressed. And that's ok. There they have a point. And even so, they don't use it that much. But the thing is, look how much we fought to get White people to stop calling us nigger. And now we are doing it.
> Deb: To ourselves. It's like we haven't got anywhere. Now White people can say, hey, look.they call themselves 'nigger', so we can too. It like gives them an excuse to keep saying it and thinking that maybe they're better than us.
> Carolyn: Yeah, because now everybody listens to it so many times on a tape and thinks its ok.

In Doug's case, he is sensitive to the historical negativity that the word conveys. However, he also defends the use of the term as part of Black cultural property:

> I: What about all the references to nigger by rappers?
> Doug: It's getting bigger and bigger. I disapprove. I think it's kind of bad. Like I said earlier, I think it means ignorance and people,especially White people might take it wrong We don't use the word in public, especially when there's White people around. Because then they think, 'oh, it's alright to call them niggers, they call themselves niggers'.
> I: So why use it all?
> Doug: Look, rappers make the music for Black people. It ain't made for anybody else. That's why they make it hard. If they keep it hard, then it will stay Black. It will stay underground. If they make it soft, it would go commercial and the people would lose the beats.

After exploring their definition of and attitudes toward the presence of the word nigger in rap, I move on to find out what the students think about rap's portrayal of Blacks in general and whether this portrayal can raise and/or lower Black self-esteem.

Many students indicate that rap has positively affected how they perceive themselves as Blacks, both individually and collectively. This feeling of greater self & social-affirmation appears to come largely from rap's heavy emphasis and celebration of Black history. The importance of this feature in rap cannot be overstressed. Almost every respondent mentions it at one point or another. For them, this new focus is helping to recast the Black image in a more progressive light after years of neglect and or distortion, especially by the media and the education system:

> Russell: When I was a kid, I used to see on tv all these gangs and they were always Black. It's like what the media shows. When I was young I really thought all Blacks were gangsters, and [that] Blacks all over the world were in famine, you know?
> I: Has rap helped to change that perception?
> Russell: Oh, yeah. It kind of boosts you up. It tells that a lot of it is just frontin' by those in power to keep us down. You begin to think, 'hey, that's not the way it really is'. And when you see these young Black rap stars coming, you say, 'yeah ,we can really achieve'.
>
> Yvonne: When I was a kid, all I saw on tv and stuff was White people and you thought it was just better. Then as I got older and started listening to this stuff(rap), you gain kind of more Black history. And it made me feel better about myself. And then I saw myself as better than that. And that's one way it really helped.
> I: better than what?
> Yvonne: Then how they've been portraying us.
>
> Reggie: He[KRS-1] talks a lot about that we should get Black history, because all the stuff we study now is mostly White. And people don't know a lot of the good things that Blacks have done for society. Like people don't know that a Black man [invented] traffic lights.
> I: How does that make you feel when rappers inform you of things like this?
> Reggie: It kind of makes me mad that we didn't know that at first...But it also makes me feel proud, and it's true.

Other students also acknowledge that rap has the capacity to influence positively self-image, but only in a limited way. For them, the bottom line is structural, ie. self-esteem has to come from you and your family:

> I: Does rap help improve your confidence and how you see yourself as a Black person?

> Cindy: It can help; but I think you pretty much develop that on your own.
>
> Trish: It only helps so much. It has to be from you and how you were raised.

To sum up this domain, the data suggest that the students have generally a strong and positive view of themselves as Black-Canadians. Interestingly, however, this is not so when it comes to their perceptions of Blacks collectively. As a whole, they express feelings of contempt, hopelessness and alienation. The group also has mixed opinions about the pervasive use of 'nigger' and overall general portrayal of Blacks in rap. Some felt the negative stereotypes serves to immerse Blacks in their own domination. For many others, words such as 'nigger' are signifiers of Black fraternity and identity, as well as subversive tools to advance and preserve Black unity, culture and power. At times they are visibly perplexed and troubled with the task of trying to define or explain what 'nigger' means. Finally, many students reveal that the music, particularly its emphasis on Black history, helps raise their esteem, both individually and collectively.

The final domain is rap and Black social awareness. Political hard core rap is largely characterized by its critical consciousness. That is to say, it is often brazenly critical of and confrontational toward various political dimensions of the dominant hegemony, such as the government, the police, the free enterprise system, the media, education etc. On some occasions, the lyrics go as far as to espouse an alternative world view. Thus I explore the group's relationship to two songs that I feel effectively exemplify this critical consciousness and emancipatory potential. They are 'Sex and Violence', by KRS-1 and 'Fight the Power', by Public Enemy. I also make passing reference to Ice-T's song Cop Killer. My main concern in these discussions is to find out the nature and degree to which the group comprehends and/or internalizes the artists' attitudes toward power, politics and capitalist structure.

Case study 1: "Sex and Violence", by KRS-1.

This song, as I interpret it, is a hard-hitting sarcastic castration of the capitalist myth. It sheds light on the way the system covertly and coldly exploits, dominates and disempowers the common person. The phrase "capitalism, the system of pimps and 'hos'" really sums up the meaning and spirit of the song. Therefore I used this line as my primary mode of enquiry. Typically I asked the students to explain what they felt the phrase(and/or the song in general) meant and whether they took it to heart. Several interesting themes emerged.

First, many students initially had difficulties understanding and/or explaining capitalism in any formal manner. Yvonne and Roger point out that this is because KRS-1's lyrics are usually very deep and, therefore, take extra time and effort to break down:

> Yvonne: Um, I'm not too sure. A lot of his messages are kind of deep.I probably would have to listen to that song a lot of times first.
>
> Roger: I probably wouldn't even realize what it meant until I broke it down. You see it's pretty deep and general. So maybe some people will have trouble picking up what it meant, especially after only hearing it a few times.

But eventually they 'do get' it, and manage to put it into their own words. And considering the complexity of the message, most of the students demonstrate a surprising depth of critical insight and comprehension. For example, upon 'breaking it down', Roger explains that:

> He's[KRS-1] talking about power and supply and demand. Same thing. You see, capitalism is like the big guys who own everything and run everything, and the 'hos' are the people who are being used.

Other students offer definitions that are equally poignant in their own special way. Often a sense of cynicism, contempt and detachment boldly punctuates their remarks about the 'system':

> I: KRS-1 mentions that capitalism is system of pimps and hos. Do you understand what is he getting at here?
> Floyd: Think about it. The skeleton of our society is naked capitalism. And so you compare what he says to how capitalism works.
> Cindy: Every man for himself, and exploiting people.
> Bruce: Maybe that everybody is rushing for a buck.
>
> Russell: Yeah, I think so. In capitalism you use someone to achieve something in life, you know. With capitalism, only one person is making all of the money. Basically, I never really liked capitalism. I can't quite put my finger on it, but there's something evil[emphatic] about it. A lot of it goes to people's heads and they feel like they can do anything they want.
>
> Marcus: Yeah, I do. Since capitalism is what you need to increase production, you have all types of people who will scam you. Pimps and and 'ho' is just another way of saying that people in society are not truthful and honest.

> I: Why is that?
> Marcus: Because that's the way man thinks. He strives for the best. Man only thinks for his own will.
> I: So is he speaking positively or negatively about capitalism?
> Marcus: It's a bad thing.

A second interesting theme is the group's contemptuous attitude toward the government. For instance, many students interpret KRS-1's reference to the word 'pimp' as representing the government. This negative association is evident in the following passages:

> I: What does KRS-1 mean by 'capitalism, the system of pimps and hos?
> Denise: There's sort of a select group that buys and sells the masses.
> I: who is that group?
> Denise: Which group the select? The government. And the word pimp kind of implies males. So maybe male government. And the hos is the rest of us. We are run by them. I think who KRS-1 is referring to as 'they' is the same group. But beyond that, nothing comes to mind.
>
> Deb: Hm, I think he means that our system is a system of users and takers. Lots of times politicians aren't thinking about the people. They just want to make money instead of governing the country in a way that will make the people happy all the time. It's more take than give.
> I: Anything you want to add to that, Carolyn?
> Carolyn: Now days politicians are literally pimps. Not all of them, but lots are into drugs and things.
>
> Doug: I guess he means were the hos and the government is the pimp. They're the ones with the power and they use everybody else.

Third, many students not only appear to agree with KRS-1's message, they also sometimes go beyond and offer compassionate intimations of alternative world views:

> I: So is the fact that it's every man for himself a good or bad thing?
> Floyd: Of course it's bad. They all say that people have the chance to better themselves and self-motivation and stuff like that. But a lot of people turn greedy and a lot of people are left behind. Look how corrupt the states is. It's a lot more corrupt than a lot of other places they talk in the news that are so corrupt.
> Bruce: KRS-1 is right, this society is for self. I'd like to see more equality.
> Floyd: I'd like to see the family come together.
> Carolyn: I think our system of lawmaking needs to be changed. The people's voice has to be heard. There is too much pain and suffering it seems now days.
>
> Darrell: You know what seriously hurt my heart? I was downtown a couple of days ago, and I saw a guy rummaging through garbage. It hurts me, man.
> Trish: I hate seeing that.
> I: What hurts, exactly?

> Darrell: The fact that he has to! We're all human. Why can't we have our basic needs met? you know what makes me sick? The White people who, no I won't say a particular group-um, the way stores throw food away.
> Trish: Yeah! In secret at the end of the day. Why can't you go on the street and give it to the people?

Without a doubt these remarks carry a strong emancipatory impulse. However, it would be a serious mistake to read too much into them in terms of a language of possibility. For deeper probes reveal a fourth theme, ie., a troubling sense of profound alienation among the students. This alienation seems to arrest any potentially serious movement toward critical action. The following passages are wonderful examples of this contradiction:

> I: So what do you think of the way things are run?
> Yvonne: Some of it, a lot of it is corrupt. I think a lot of it is false fronted. Like they just, it looks a certain way but really it isn't like that.
> I: Is there anything you would like to see changed?
> Yvonne: I'd like to see more openness, more unity. I don't know. I haven't really thought that. What can you do, really?
>
> Trish: It[capitalism] promotes greed and stealing. But I don't see another system that's any better. Because Socialism promotes power and the greed for power too.
> Darrell: I think it's bad. But, again, what can you do? That's the way it's always been, right?
>
> Marcus: People will do anything to succeed for their own benefit. I don't agree with it. I'd like to see people work more together. But what can you do?
> I: I don't know. But doesn't BDP say the truth can always be questioned?
> Marcus: Good point[laughter]. Well, that's true. But what can you do when so many people don't want to do that?
> I: Is that just the way man is or is he taught to be selfish?
> Marcus: That's just the way man is.
> I: So there's no point in making an effort to change that?
> Marcus: No. I think it would be good to make an effort. But you got a lot of hard-headed people out there that don't want to listen.
>
> Doug: I personally think our political system is fucked. We're fucked until we die.
> I: Why?
> Doug: Because society is screwed up. No one has it equal, but we have this amendment that says we are. For example, Blacks were promised 40 acres and a mule after slavery. They're still waiting on it.

Case Study 2: "Fight the Power", by Public Enemy(PE).

Public Enemy's controversial hit song 'Fight the Power' is a fierce and furious anthem that directs attention to the need for Black unity and collective awareness of how the dubious 'game' of domination is played. As I mentioned earlier, my enquiry revolved around the song's title. The first step was to find out who the students thought the 'powers' were.

The students offer a variety of interpretations of what or who they think the 'power' represents. Some explanations are quite general:

> I: You list Public Enemy's 'Fight the Powers" as one of your favourite songs. Who are these powers?
> Marcus: The prejudiced people.
> Doug: People holding others back.
>
> Russell: Anyone that stands in the way.

But most interpretations are more specific, often singling out White institutional powers, especially government and the police:

> I: Who is PE referring to by 'power'?
> Roger: White Bureaucracy.
>
> Keith: Government. Whites. Things that are holding you down.
>
> Monica: Whites. I could say government too, especially like in Africa and the States.
>
> Chantelle: A lot of rappers talk negatively about the police. I think they could be a power, because it's real bad in the States. Look at Rodney King.
>
> Reggie: People like PE and Ice Cube rap about the police treating Blacks bad. And Ice -T, he's rough. He's got that song 'Cop Killer'. So when they say fight the power, they can mean the police, because a lot of cops are racists and harass you.

In some cases, the interpretations move to an even more complex level:

> Bruce: The forces that oppose Blacks.
> Floyd: Not necessarily White people. But anybody who stops a Black person from achieving.
> Cindy: It could even be your own people. You could be getting good marks, and your own Black people may say, 'why you like that?'
>
> Chantelle: It could be a number of things. Racism is a power that rules people. Drugs rule people. Politics, or I should say government. Things that have so much control over people's lives.

And in one interesting exchange, two students relate the meaning of 'power' directly to rap music and the Canadian experience. That is to say, they speculate, in rather impressive detail, on who the 'power' might be and how and why it relates to certain kinds of rap:

> Trish: The power is any group that has the ability to keep the Black voice down. And it's all around us. Just look at rap. You see, I really like Paris. . . He writes intelligent music. But not many people are into Paris.
> I: Why's that?
> Trish: You know why, because his tape isn't available in Canada. And that makes me vexed.
> Darrell: I have this friend and he says we got all the leftovers from the States. When you go down there, you have this great selection.
> Trish: Some of them are banned. And they say this place is so equal.
> I: You make it sound like someone is consciously deciding this. Isn't it just a matter of the marketplace, you know, supply and demand? Perhaps there just isn't the demand for Paris up here.
> Trish: It's not the marketplace. Because I was talking to everybody and they say they've heard Paris and say like he's so good and stuff.
> Darrell: I think it's the government or somebody has censored the stuff and not brought it into the country.
> Trish: I think it's partly the government too, because we should have free trade. The thing is, everything is so restricted.
> I: Is it certain types of rap that are being restricted, or all types?
> Trish: I think it's more the political ones that talk about stuff like 'Bush killa'(a song by Paris). People who talk about the system.
> I: Why would our government want to restrict political rap?
> Trish: Because they think it speaks to the social conscious of Blacks. . . and it might start a revolution[sarcastically].

After exploring the group's interpretation of who the 'power' might be, I then asked the students whether Public Enemy ever articulates the means by which to fight the power. Their responses are far more mixed than with the previous question. A few students claim that they outright do not know how to fight the power. Some students draw on Malcom X's famous adage 'by any means necessary' to make their point that it is through violent action as a last recourse for self-defense:

> I: How does PE say to fight the power? With guns?
> Doug: No. No. They don't believe in that. They're not revolutionists, not with guns anyways. But there's ones that believe in self-defence, I guess. Paris, I think, is one who believes in the Malcom X theory, that if they come at you with a gun shooting, then it's time to protect yourself. Why the hell are you running, you know?
>
> Bruce: 'Shut 'em Down'!
> I: Shut who down?
> Cindy: The government, the police.
> I: Does shut 'em down mean violently?
> Cindy: Through any means necessary, quoting Malcom X. If they ain't listening to the voice of reason, then if you want it, go for it.

> Roger: They don't say it in a democratic way or process. They say go after it and get it by any means necessary. Actually, a lot of groups talk about using violence: Ice Cube, Guerrillas in the Mist. . . .

However, by and large, the group indicates that fighting the power means becoming unified and critically aware:

> Trish: Most of the rappers I listen to say we need some unity.
> Bruce: Exactly!
> I: Unity among all humans or just Blacks?
> Trish: I can't stand people who talk world peace; because if we can't get ourselves together as Blacks, how the hell are we going to get world peace?
>
> Doug: People always be searching for answers. Hip hop isn't all about controversy. If anything they talk about, it's [about] creating awareness and bringing Black people together. Take Chuck D(of PE), for example, he's suing St. Ides Beer for selling liquor only in the ghetto. He makes you think why is it only in the ghetto? It makes you kind of sick. And he gets angry at Blacks for drinking it. And that's how he's trying to change things. PE is rough and that's how they come off so well. The point is they're starting to fight.
>
> Chantelle: I think they want unity. Like with PE, they're like telling us what's going on. And we need to unify.

In one very interesting case, a respondent explains in her own rough and round about way what she thinks PE means by fighting the power. For her, the key is to get beneath the 'false fronts' in order to challenge and change the structure:

> Monica: In this country, rap has shown me that there are a lot of false fronts.
> I: Can you elaborate on this false front?
> Monica: Um. It's hard to explain. You see, what PE talks about is that Black people in the States have to go above not below, to get justice or what you need. And the power is the one ruling, they're at the top. And that's why if someone is doing you wrong, you better get that power. Like if I was fighting with someone, and if she brought her friends, I wouldn't want to fight her friends. I'd want to go after the power that's doing all of this.
> I: Oh, that's what you mean by higher and below.
> Monica: Right. Go to the top. If you destroy the top, then everything else goes too.

The final step in this enquiry was to find out whether the group agrees with the song's message. Most of the students embrace the song's battle cry to fight the power but not without much reservation and/or cautious conviction. A few students, for instance, are somewhat sceptical of the whole notion of raising awareness. They feel the message is limited in its potential because it does not go far enough in terms of offering practical solutions. In other words, describing the problem is simply not enough:

> Denise: They try to draw awareness to the problems. And that's positive. I think it's necessary . But here's the problem I have with Public Enemy. Sure they're good at telling us about what it's like, the problems for Blacks and everything. But get beyond that. I don't think they offer solutions and we need that to change things.
>
> Bruce: They're telling us, "look, look what's going on." But that's all they're saying. We also need to know how to unite. All we do is listen. We don't do it.

Some students think that the 'fight' is only necessary and applicable to the American scene. On the one hand this sentiment is not surprising considering the cultural and social differences between the two country's. But on the other hand, it is also fascinating and confounding considering the group's problematic view of the system in Canada:

> Denise: It's kind of intense-sounding. I don't think it was really directed at me. This song wasn't sung for my benefit.
> I: If not you, then who?
> Denise: To the Blacks in the projects. Like the rest of society is keeping them down.
> I: When they say, 'fight the power', does this include in Canada?
> Monica: No, not really. I think they are directing it to places with more problems and stuff. Like the States or South Africa.

Several students, however, do not differentiate between the two cultures in their endorsement of the song's theme. Interestingly, in their call to fight the powers in Canada, very few of them prescribe violent confrontation as an acceptable means. Instead, they propose the fight be done selectively and through peaceful means:

> I: Do you agree that the powers need to be fought?
> Carolyn: In some areas.
> Deb: I'm not into like, if the society becomes corrupt, let's go kill them all. I think if you're doing it with a pen or with words, then that's ok.
>
> Roger: Yeah, the power needs to be fought. But the way to do it has to be more undertoned, like through voting. Not so violent.
>
> Marcus: If it's through violence, then I don't think so. I think people need to come together and discuss things.

There are, however, two exceptions to this relatively passive stance. The group consistently singles out the media and the police as justifiable targets of explicit condemnation and even physical confrontation. Yvonne's remarks typify the group's hostile sentiment toward the media:

> I: Do you sometimes disagree with the way Blacks are portrayed by the media?
> Yvonne: Yes! It really makes me mad sometimes how they blow things out of proportion. And look how in the newspaper they always show only pictures of starving Blacks or Blacks being helped by Whites. I think they do that on purpose and it's not right.

Moreover, many students mention that Public Enemy(among other rappers) has increased their awareness of the role the media plays in advancing this hegemonic discourse:

> I: Does rap talk about the media?
> Bruce: Oh yeah! especially, PE. There's a song on that tape you played called 'The Post'. It's about how the media negatively portrays Blacks and the ghetto. PE tells you not to believe the hype. Cos' if you do, maybe you will think the Black man's inferior.
>
> Doug: And there's a lot of powers holding hip-hop back. Radio is one. Why the hell isn't rap on the radio. It sells over a billion dollars a year.
> I: Who is holding it back?
> Doug: PE would say White corporations who run the media. Racism, I guess. Their afraid it's gonna have a bad effect, maybe start a riot or something. I don't know.
> Monica: PE talks about how the media makes it bigger than it is. Media likes to find the worst part of a person and break it down. That's part of the reason why rap is getting such a negative reaction. I also think they have a problem with the fact that rap is Black dominated. You know, racism.

As for the police, many students appear to understand and identify quite strongly with PE's anti-police themes and other songs with similar themes, especially Ice-T's, "Cop-Killer". The students never go as far as to advocate killing police. But, often the students become quite animated and impassioned when asked to share their experiences with or attitudes toward the police:

> I: What do you think of the police?
> Yvonne: I don't think they are really fair.
> I: So what do you think of the song "Cop Killer"?
> Yvonne: I think he's just talking about cops and calling them pigs, because a lot of them are racists. Though there's some good ones too.
> I: Can you understand why Ice-T wrote that song?
> Yvonne: Yeah, because I saw it here last year.
> I: Where?
> Yvonne: At the stabbing at Shep. And also when you go to the mall or something, they follow you and harass you.
> I: How does that make you feel?

> Yvonne: It gets you really mad because you know that it's unfair.
> I: What do you do with that anger?
> Yvonne: You may yell back at them; or you might use your head more and get them in trouble.
>
> Chantelle: Yeah. Look at the ('92 LA) riots. Such senseless beatings. But then again, this is so awful, when I think back about it, those people should have beat the cops. It's too hard to explain.
> I: Isn't that what Ice-T's song "Cop Killer" is about?
> Chantelle: Believe it or not? I agree with that song.
> I: Would you say your friends feel the same way.
> Chantelle: Oh yeah! Really and truly they do, because with Rodney there was no hiding what they did.
> I: What are your views on the police?
> Chantelle: Up here, we're safe. But down there, it gets me mad. What they did to Rodney was a very terrible thing.

A few students even allude to actively confronting the police because of their identification with rappers who have shared similar experiences:

> Reggie: Sometimes you hear something like Too Short talking about how cops always be holding him up and asking him how he got his fancy car and all this stuff. . . So it kind of makes me think, 'oh, cops, they're bad'. And then when you see one, it's like totally a bad attitude. And if they show me an attitude, then it's gonna come right back.

However, as was the case with the song by KRS-1, one must be careful not to read too much into the group's display of radical possibility. Many students speak to surface appearance(or reproductive symbolic mediation) and aspects of alienation, such as reification, which prevents actualization of this increased political/oppositional awareness:

> Chantelle: It's not even working at all. It's just sitting there. They're saying fight the powers, you know. Like you've got kids walking around saying it, like they know about it. But that's because it looks good. It's not going anywhere, at least not right now.
>
> I: How's that make you feel when the police or security(at the mall) hassle you for no apparent reason?
> Roger: Angry.
> I: What do you do with that anger?
> Roger: I don't know. What can you do?
>
> I: Do you agree with what rappers like PE and Ice-T say about police?
> Marcus: Yeah. I think it's real bad in the States.
> I: Can you relate to what they're saying living in Edmonton?
> Marcus: You see, I drive a Daytona and one time a White lady called the cops thinking I stole it. And the cops pulled me over. Actually I notice

> them following me a lot, especially at night, and I'm not being paranoid. But there's not much you can do about it, except maybe talk about it.

In short, my aim here was to find out the group's attitudes and perceptions of deeper structural matters, particularly in terms of power, politics and capitalism. Put simply, I wanted to know what they thought of the 'system'. My inquiry involved trying to determine the nature and degree to which the group comprehends and endorses two songs that are particularly critical of hegemonic institutions and discourses. The assumption being, one cannot account for much resistance if the group largely misunderstands and or rejects the central themes of the songs.

The students indicate that the complexity of some lyrics are initially difficult to break down. They also have trouble relating to formal concepts such as capitalism. But gradually they manage an impressive grasp of the songs' meanings in their own terms. As for identifying with the songs, the students clearly demonstrate their support, At times they speaking about the dominant structure with much contempt and cynicism. The group agrees with Public Enemy that the power needs to be fought. This is particularly apparent in respect to their views on the media, government and the police. Ironically, despite this critical attitude toward their own country, some students do not think this fight pertains to Canada. But for the majority that do, they are clearly against the use of total violence, stipulating the fight has to be done selectively and peacefully. Finally, one cannot overstress the fact that though a critical consciousness of the system is evident, in the last instance, the group seems unable to move to action because of their underlying sense of alienation. That is, they perceive many aspects of the dominant hegemony in a problematic light, but in the end do not think that they can be changed.

Political rap: A final note on salience and comprehension

This section covers interesting and important themes relating to salience and comprehension that were not addressed above. Particular attention is given to the role that the 'beats', or overall sound, plays in political rap music.

We saw strong evidence in the data that the group understands and identifies with the lyrics or message of a song. However, one cannot overstress the fact that the beats or sound is ultimately what the group appreciates most:

> I: Let's talk about the beat for a minute, especially in regards to hard core. Would you say it's the biggest part of rap, or are the lyrics, or both?
> Trish: It has to start with the beat. I like hard core cos' hard core has rhythm. It has base. It has strength.
>
> Reggie: It's weird. Because you can actually suck as a rapper. But as soon as you get a wicked beat, everybody thinks you're rough.
> I: So which is most important, the beat or the lyrics?
> Reggie: The beat is like the high point to it. It's what I like best. But you do have to write good lyrics too.
>
> Marcus: To tell you the truth, I listen to rap for the beats. Most people I know listen for the beat. If it ain't good, nobody will listen.

When asked why the beats were most important, many students indicate that it has to do with creating energy and bringing people together under one groove:

> Doug: The beat creates energy. Another thing is that dance is a big part of hip -hop. You want to get people to move. Beats keep everybody in time. You see, it's a timing thing. Everybody under one groove, one nation.

Others point out that the beats take a person away from everyday hardships. In other words, they serve as medium for escape:

> Monica: It takes me to another world.
>
> Chantelle: The beat gives you energy. Sometimes it just picks you up and takes you away.

Some students, however, reveal that the beats also can have the opposite effect. That is, they can ground a person in the shocks of life, which can be a disturbing thing as one respondent reveals below:

> Reggie: It can really pick me up. But it's negative in a way too because it kind of makes me feel bad. Because if I look into it, it makes me feel bad that guys keep shootin' up. It's got like trouble in it.

In a social setting, the beats are not just invigorating, but also appear to facilitate Black solidarity and affirmation:

> Reggie: One time on our way to a basketball game, we were in this van. And Shiftee came on, and 7 and 11 of us guys were Black and we were jumping up and down and singing. And the White guys were just sitting there, wondering why are these guys doing that? we were just laughing Shiftee off, man.

> Monica: The beats make you move. It's one of the best feelings you could have. Like if you are with your friends and stuff, then everything is a-ok. Because we like our music and it brings you together.
>
> Marcus: It makes me feel alive, makes me want to dance. And like with some rap, like PE, the beats make you feel superior; well, ah, I don't want to say superior because you don't want to feel superior to anybody else. I guess it just makes you feel like being with everybody.

One respondent even implies that the beats have the potential to play a secondary role in spurring oppositional action:

> Roger: It's not like rap can cause a revolution. But, say if a group of Blacks were going out there to riot, I'm sure rap would be right up there with them. Sometimes the beat just gets people going.

The data also suggest that there is a certain time, place and a mood for listening to conscious rap. Usually it is when a person is alone or in a non-festive social setting, for example, when a small group is simply hanging out. Moreover, the person is usually in either an agitated(or as one respondent described it, a 'scrubby') mood or a withdrawn, contemplative mindframe. This point is important because it reminds us not to treat rap as an homogenous entity. Different styles of rap suit different moods and situations:

> Doug: If this[referring to a song by rapper Shy Heim] was at a party, everybody would be singing, 'and this goes on, sha. . . . '
> Reggie: Yeah, but no one would be really listening to what he was talking about. But say I was alone and listening on my walkman, it would be totally different. The words would go straight to my head. Maybe I'd be singing to myself, you know.
>
> Roger: Like I said, I like listening to that stuff. But I wouldn't want to be subjected to that all the time. It's like so heavy and negative. Only like when I want to think about it.
> I: So it's not something you put on everyday?
> Roger: No, maybe if you're in a bad mood or something.

In previous domains, we have seen the impressive degree to which the group has demonstrated its grasp of the music's message. But when I probed into this issue of how they comprehended rap, I found a fascinating dialectical relationship emerging between the beat and the lyrics. Many students indicate that the beat is like a hook that brings people into the music. The message then slips in on the coat-tails of the beat, so to speak. In other words, the message emerges via a distillation process of the beat:

> Chantelle: The beat is what attracts you to things they say. With a good beat, you then can attach any words you want.

> Marcus: Usually when you keep listening to the beat, the words just come naturally. Then over time you realize what you're listening to.
> I see. So the message kind of sneaks up in through the back door?
> Marcus: Yeah, right. But it has to start with the beat.

A number of other interesting themes emerged as well. For instance, as we saw earlier, several students have difficulty initially interpreting message rap. However, the group savours this challenge because it makes the musical experience more dynamic, more enjoyable:

> Reggie: With stuff like BDP and PE, it usually takes a number of times to pick it all up. But that's why message rap is so different. Everytime you listen to it, you pick up something different. I never get bored with it.

Other students point out that the mental processing of a song comes and goes with a particular context or situation:

> I: Does a song's message go straight to your head, or do you pick it up over time?
> Yvonne: Indirectly. It will come into your mind and then it will leave it for a while. And then when a situation comes up where it is relevant to it, then it will come back.

In short, the group generally demonstrates a strong affinity to rap with a political message. They enjoy the music because it heightens their awareness of social issues and injustices relating to the Black condition. But political hard core is by no means the only kind of rap that they listen to. The group listens to a variety of rap styles, depending on their mood and situation. They typically prefer message rap when they are alone and in a somewhat agitated or contemplative mood. The group also makes it clear that when it comes to listening to rap, hard core or otherwise, the beats or sound came first, then the lyrics. For them, the beats usually pick them up and make them feel alive. They are particularly fond of strong, rhythmic base, typical of hard core. Many students also point out that the music has the tendency to bring Black people under one rhythm of Black solidarity, unity, and expression.

As for comprehension, a fascinating dialectical relationship emerged between the beats and the lyrics. The beats not only come first, but also serve as a rhythmic medium for the message. It is as though the beats are the broth or base in which the message stews and simmers, and gradually, over time, is realized. Many students indicate that listening to message rap is a very dynamic and multi-layered experience. Often the depth of a song's meaning prevents any spontaneous discovery of its meaning, and sometimes appeal for that matter, to a listener. Perhaps this is why one respondent comments that this 'kind' of rap is mysterious and tends to 'suck you into it'. Typically, processing or comprehending message rap is no easy task. It takes time, attention and quite commonly depends on a certain context to trigger a realization of a given song's wit and wisdom. But eventually, as was evident in previous domains such as religion, the students usually demonstrate a remarkable grasp of the issues embedded in a given song. In addition, for most of the students, this complexity turns out to be not a bad thing. Rather, it is part of the reason why they like hard core. It adds a freshness to the music in that often when they listen to a song, they extract or learn something new from it.

Chapter VI

Discussion and Conclusion

In this final chapter I will, first, present a discussion of the major findings of the study. The discussion is divided into two sections: (1) discussion of controversy and (2) discussion on resistance. I will also attempt to show how the findings, and my interpretation of them, might serve to further enhance our understanding of both rap music and the concept of resistance. Secondly, I will outline key limitations of this study and suggest areas in which further research might be concentrated.

Just to briefly reiterate, this thesis had two research objectives. The primary research objective was to determine whether Black-Canadian youths were seeing/using rap music as a form of resistance. This objective directly informed resistance theory's primary assumption that there are moments when subordinate groups challenge and sometimes successfully transcend the dominant hegemony. An ancillary objective was constructed to record the group's impressions of five controversial themes in rap as identified in the literature. This was done to broaden our understanding of the rap's most sensitive themes. It also indirectly informed the primary research objective because controversial themes carried with them the implication that conventional norms were possibly being confronted or resisted. In order to gather data, I played and/or referred to rap music which was decidedly radical and controversial and then investigated the nature and degree to which the students listened to, comprehended and related the music to their everyday lives.

A Discussion of the Domains of Controversy

The findings show that the group has a very comprehensive, contingent and often contradictory view of the controversial themes in rap.

We saw that in many respects the students agree with popular criticism. That is, they acknowledge that rap has the propensity to be too vulgar, too violent and too misogynistic. They also criticize rap's one-dimensionally repetitive beats and shallow or shoddy-constructed lyrics. And they are especially hard on those rappers that use excessive profanity and/or violence in their music simply to sell music or conceal a lack of talent. In their view nothing is worse than a sell-out or a fake. Such criticisms definitely suggest that the students are very discriminating music listeners.

But the group also strongly qualifies these same criticisms on a number of fronts. First and foremost, they argue that not all rap, including hard core, is mindless, crude and/or sensationally violent. In fact, the group argues that a lot of rap is impressively intelligent and mature. We saw evidence of this sophistication in the group's illuminating discussion on rap and religion. Moreover, the group repeatedly demonstrates their uncanny ability to differentiate between talented rappers and those that are just 'frontin' or faking it. Like other pop genres, there is good rap and there is bad rap. Good rap, as many students so astutely point out, is real and true to its roots. It has biting wit, a clever sense of humour, intelligent and well-constructed lyrics, and, most of all, a fresh, funky beat.

Second, the group is very critical and/or suspicious of institutional authorities who tend to stereotype rap as one homogenously negative entity. Some students go as far as to speculate that this stereotype is being advanced by various authorities in order to either sell or censor rap. One cannot overstress how strongly and passionately the group feels about the issue of exploiting or misrepresenting rap. Such zeal and critical insight illustrates their tremendous attachment to the music as well as their ability to engage in a language of critique.

Third, the data reveal clearly that the group listens to rap for more than just profanity and graphic depictions of sex/violence. Interestingly, many students contend that controversial themes are more appealing to White listeners. For the group, consuming rap is a more wholistic experience in which the beats and message come first. Profanity is an accessory that is occasionally necessary to preserve Black cultural property and/or express one's emotions. Moreover, students perceive the references to drugs, profanity, and violence, as understandable, if not acceptable, because these sorts of things reflect real life for most rappers. As mentioned before, the group places a premium on living true.

Finally, there is the contentious issue of negative causal influence. The group rejects unequivocally any notion that implicates rap as a direct cause of negative behaviour. Many students posit that the music may play the role of a catalyst. That is, it may reinforce or push a person with an existing distressed mental state to possibly go over the edge. But this does not happen suddenly, rather it usually happens over time. Moreover, the students claim that disturbed people with a deep affective investment and familiarity with the music are particularly vulnerable to causal influence.

These references to time and personal attachment to the music need deeper consideration, for they suggest that perhaps we need to rethink how we research the causal issue in pop music. As we saw in the literature, critics and researchers have concentrated on the issue of if and how pop music affects people directly or consciously. But perhaps we need to shift our focus to how and why music indirectly, subtly and/or latently penetrates or influences the psyche and behaviour, especially regarding troubled youths. In other words, we need to move from a one-sided surface approach to understanding the relationship between music and behaviour to one that is more wholistic and sensitive.

Many students also argue, or perhaps complain is a better word, that a lot of people like to act 'tough' or come off 'hard' in terms of their language and posturing after listening to hard core. In other words, people imitate or incorporate rap's hard core themes in the form of symbolic style or attitude. Unfortunately, I was unable to ascertain from the data the nature of and degree to which this imitation was actually occurring on the streets. Such information would have likely come from extensive participant observation with the students. Nevertheless, it is significant enough that the data suggests that young people are engaging one another on a highly symbolic terrain. For what are we to make of this albeit symbolic causal relationship between the music and human agency? If it is becoming 'cool' to be tough and violent, what impact could or is this having on how we interact with one another? At what point does this symbolic expression cross over to real acts physical violence? These are important questions that need to be explored, especially within a context of participant observation.

It is very important to bear in mind that the group does not lay the primary onus of blame(or praise) on the music. Instead, they strongly contend that deeper contingent factors are at work in shaping attitudes and behaviour. In particular, they place paramount importance on structural instabilities, such as poverty and broken homes, and, critical autonomy, ie. the individual's own mood and mind state. This emphasis on structural factors positively informs the position that popular music is more a reflection than a shaper of reality.

A Discussion of the Domains of Resistance

Several major themes emerge from the data which strongly suggest that Black-Canadian youths relate to rap as a form of resistance. However, as we will see, this relationship is neither absolute nor complete. That is, the group is engaged in a form of resistance that is, on the one hand, limited because of its contingency and contradictions; but on the other hand, it is unlimited in what it could become in the future if we remain open to speculation.

One obvious sign that the group uses rap as a form of resistance is reflected in the simple fact that they listen to rap with oppositional themes. We saw, for instance, that students had no problem identifying the various artists that I played. Moreover, they strongly endorse political rappers such as Queen Latifah, Public Enemy and KRS-1. Many students indicate that they like message rap because the music 'makes them think' and arouses their curiosity. In other words, it is intelligent. Moreover, they find that heavy lyrics keeps the music fresh. That is, they never get bored with it because they are always picking up new themes from a song. However, it is important to bear in mind that political rap is not the only type of rap that the group listens to. Mood and situation dictates the type of rap that they play.

The group not only listens to political rap, they also demonstrate an impressively deep level of comprehension. We saw, for instance, how many students were able to break down, albeit gradually, even the most complex songs, such as "The Real Holy Place", by KRS-1. This is obviously an important theme because one cannot argue a case for resistance if the group were unable to understand the music's resistant themes?

A third theme is that the group shares many of the same critical values that are espoused in the music. We saw several students, for example, strongly identify with Public Enemy's bitter attack against major institutional powers such as the government, police, school, and media. Other students identify with KRS-1's critique of capitalism and Christianity. Often this critique was surprisingly lucid and hostile. Some students go as far as offering an alternate world view, one that strives to fulfil basic needs and principles of equality and fraternity. I do not think the general public is fully aware of just how critical the music and its listeners are of the dominant hegemony. I think this is especially true in the case of rap's view of Christianity. If they were, perhaps rap would be even more controversial. Likely, the public has overlooked these other controversial domains in their crusade against the more notorious themes of sex and violence.

Fourth, many students explain that they use rap to help them make sense of the world, particularly in the case of breaking down the 'false fronts' created by institutional powers. I think this ability to raise and inspire curiosity and critical awareness is perhaps one of rap's most redeeming qualities. And I do not think people fully appreciate or realize the scope or the potential ramifications of this awareness. For four hundred years Blacks have been inhibited and silenced by a slave consciousness. The Civil Rights Movement marked the beginning of a new consciousness. However, back then this consciousness was largely the property of a few people. With the mass proliferation of music television videos, CDs and cassettes, popular periodicals such as 'The Source', etc, rap now has the potential to infiltrate, subvert, and radicalize the minds of millions of young Blacks all at once.

The group also uses rap to bring about unity. But it is not so much the lyrics as it the beat that the group uses to bring people together. We saw several students allude to the beats as a source of spiritual energy, both individually and collectively. The beats appear to reaffirm, regenerate and redeem young Black identity and continuity. Moreover, one senses young Blacks cherish the beats as a their own piece of cultural property. They have little else to call their own. This emphasis on the beats speaks directly to Giroux's notion of politicizing the affective. For there is an unmistakable sense of possibility when the group speaks of this unifying and elevating effect of the beats. The beats along with the lyrics seem to constitute a thought/spirit movement or revolution-there is something very 'hegelian' about rap. I think the following quote helps capture the essence of rap and of this theme as a form of resistance:

> Sooner or later someone's going to catch the imagination of these people with some new magic. At the bottom of it will be a promise of regaining the feeling of participation, the feeling of being needed on earth-hell, dignity. The police are bright enough to look for people like that, and lock them up under the anti-sabotage laws. But sooner or later someone's going to keep out of their sight long enough to organize a following. (Vonnegut Jr. 1952:94)

Finally, the group uses rap to raise their self-esteem. For instance, we saw many students praise rappers such as KRS-1 for advancing and celebrating Black history and cultural achievements. The music can be a source of pride. Similarly, many female students look to rappers such as Queen Latifah for support and reinforcement. Rap's ability to improve Black self-concept is extremely important, especially in a world that fails to promote positive Black role models. A strong sense of self is vital to any notion of social transformation. After all, all change starts from within.

The previous collection of themes suggests that the group relates strongly to rap as a form of resistance. But one must be careful not to read too much optimism in the data. For the group's relationship to the music is also marked by serious problems of contingency and contradiction. Several themes reflect the limiting and humbling influence of these two factors.

For instance, on the one hand, the group appears to be inuring themselves to the pro-Black message. However, on the other hand, we saw many students complain that people tend to imitate the worst aspects of the music. Or as one respondent put it, 'there are a lot of wannabe's'. That is, they tend to import or incorporate all the trappings of American gangster rap style: ie., the limped posture, tough look and raw language'. Thus it appears that people also relate to rap as a form of reproductive mediation. This point is important because it reminds us not to overstate the positive aspects of rap.

A second negative theme is sexism. Though the sample endorses strongly pro-women rappers, many students, including some females, still maintain an underlying problematic attitude toward women. We saw this was particularly the case with their view of urban African-American women. Part of the problem seems to be that these students lack the terms of class analysis which would perhaps help explain why such women are vulnerable to the exploitation of their Black male counterparts.

Third, the group appears to be caught in an identity crisis over the use of the word 'nigger' in rap. On the one hand, the group uses the term as a weapon of cultural solidarity. But on the other hand, it also is a cause of a great deal of division and confusion. In a way the term signifies the group's general struggle to come to terms with their own identity as Blacks after decades of historical distortion, social oppression and cultural invisibility. And in a sense, the music is both cause and consequence of this struggle.

A fourth theme is the group's underlying cautious orientation to the music's radical themes. We saw, for instance, that while many students endorsed Public Enemy's anthem to fight the power, this endorsement always carried with it a markedly reserved and passive sentiment. One senses that the group is willing to resist but only within the perimeters of passive accommodation.

Finally, the group has an underdeveloped language of possibility. This is reflected in two ways. First, the group is unable to derive any potential solutions from the music. In other words, the music seems to impact consciousness but falls short of instigating a course of action. For instance, we saw several students accuse Public Enemy of this shortcoming. If this criticism sounds familiar, it should not be surprising. For we saw earlier that resistance theory is prone to the same attack. Both rap and resistance theory seem to lack adequate practical strategies for social change. Secondly, there is the sense of alienation among the group. One cannot overstress the significance of this feeling. It appears in almost every domain. It is reflected in the group's bleak view of the future, in their estranged attitude towards the Black collective, and in their reified perception of the dominant hegemony. It is very frustrating and disconcerting to experience. On the one hand, the group demonstrates this incredibly lucid critique of hegemonic injustice, but on the other hand, they inevitably stop short of doing anything about it. One detects a feeling of perplexed helplessness. In other words, the emancipatory rhetoric is there in the group's relationship to the music, but not the will to actualize it.

I said earlier that the group's use of rap as a form of resistance is limited. The previous themes show this to be the case. However, I also said that their relationship to the music is potentially unlimited. I shall end the discussion segment of this chapter with an elaboration of this point.

I want to extend this study's perimeters of possibility by committing ourselves to two speculative notions. I mentioned earlier that Black consciousness has been struggling to overcome the chains of slavery for four hundred years. Change does not happen over night. That is why I suggest that we approach the findings of this study with patience and foresight. In other words, we need to ground this study in a broader context of time. If we do that, then perhaps we will be more open to speculation that the group is moving towards greater self- and social transformation. Perhaps at this point in time the group and young Blacks in general are still engaged in the process of consciousness-raising. Only now it has finally happening at the mass level. And rap is playing a part in this process. I suspect that over time this consciousness or thought/spirit revolution will gradually manifest itself into action. Too many people are 'finding out what time it is' to turn the clock back.

I also suggest that perhaps we may increase or speed up the possibility of social transformation by harnessing the radical energy of young people, especially marginalized segments. The findings of this study definitely show that young people possess a radical, albeit underdeveloped, consciousness. Secondary school could function as an excellent space for radical engagement. Teachers could perhaps function more as a catalyst or facilitator for critical action. Of course, this would not be an easy task. The secondary school experience has a way of 'fixing' both teacher and student not to challenge 'what is' and not to wonder about 'what is not'. Students may begin school with radical hope but all too often they graduate with cynicism and apathy, especially at the collective level. That is why we need to intervene before it is too late. We need to fan these glowing embers of radical consciousness with courage and conviction, and the right tools. Perhaps rap music can be one of these tools.

These references to critical awareness and the need for radical engagement via tools such as rap music carry with them significant implications for educators in particular and the sociology of education in general. One implication, as I just stated, is that perhaps teachers need to redefine their role, that is., consider both the potential risks and rewards of taking on a more critically active attitude and interaction with students. A second implication of this study is that it seems to illustrate that schools also need to reconsider the role that popular texts(such as rap music) should play in the learning process. I feel that this study reveals a very positive potential in this regard. This study also is important to educators because it serves as a window into the world of the students. It illuminates,for instance, their impressive, not to mention often overlooked, level of wisdom and compassion. Such insights may help increase our understanding of youth and in so doing help narrow what seems to be a growing conflict between youth and authorities.

In short, the data definitely suggests that the group uses rap as a form of resistance. However, at this point in time, this relationship is not absolute nor complete. Rather, the group's level of resistance is characterized by limitations. Perhaps, the possibility for more radical expression will come 'in time' and with appropriate interventions.

Directions for Further Research

Briefly, I would like to make four major recommendations for future research.

The first suggestion springs from one of the limitations of the present research. This study was originally conceived from and intended for a Black American urban experience. However, time and money prevented this from happening. Modifying the study for Edmonton meant serious constraints and qualifications, most obvious of which was the sheer fact that the city's Black community hardly reflected its American counterpart, both in terms of numbers and historical experience. Consequently, in the process of recruiting participants, I basically had to take who I could get- even though I ideally wanted underclass Blacks. With this limitation in mind, any further research in this area must address the rap phenomenon in an appropriate Black inner-urban setting. A study of this kind may present more potent expressions of and insights into Black youth, rap music and resistance theory. In addition it may shed light on questions raised in this study. For instance, in comparison to their northern counterparts, do African-American youths maintain a more or less radical orientation towards rap music and hegemonic oppression?

Secondly, and in a related fashion, we would suggest that any further research in this area include participant observation. The validity and reliability of the present study was severely limited without it. For instance, the group demonstrates a strong and impressive emancipatory rhetoric. However, we have no comprehensive way of measuring whether this rhetoric is actually being lived out. In other words, we lack adequate tools to verify words with deeds. Moreover, participant observation would be an effective way to capture the nature and degree to which symbolic mediation serves as a form of resistance for Black youth? Such observation could even be documented on video, perhaps as a Ph.d dissertation.

Thirdly, I recommend that further research consider carefully the variables of class and race. For instance, it would be interesting and beneficial to explore the claims the students made regarding rap and Whites. Or focus on urban Native youth in Canada. What is their relationship to rap, if any at all? Do they listen to any music as a form of resistance? Further research also could focus on Black relationships to rap based on class. For example, does class affect how Blacks relate to rap music?

Finally, I suggest that further theoretical research be directed at developing and testing more practical tools of analysis for resistance theory. For instance, Giroux stresses that an adequate notion of resistance must take into consideration forms of subconscious domination. I whole-heartedly agree with him, especially after witnessing the group's disheartening sense of alienation. However, it is one thing to say we need to do this, and it is another thing to know how to do it. Conceptual clarification is also necessary in the area of possibility. This does not mean providing a blueprint of what should or ought to be. It simply means we need better practical tools to help oppressed people determine how to move toward their intrinsic goals and visions.

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Appendix One

Sample of Lyrics Used in Study

1. 'The Real Holy Place", by KRS-1

Why are metaphysical teachers forbidden?
The only way to talk to god is in the church.
You must be kidding.
For years they kept god hidden.
Look for god in self not in something that is written.
If your slave master wasn't a Christian, you wouldn't be a Christian. (repeat !!!)
The whole culture's missing. . .
The belief in one god is called monotheism; you see the truth is not hard.
All you gotta know is the facts:
when religion is mixed with politics, it all gets waxed.
You gotta know your history, or they'll tell you god is a mystery.
And when you are born, you're born in sin...
That's bullshit! That's bullshit!!!!
They're only saying you can't win, you can't succeed, you can't achieve.
Don't ask about god, just sit there and believe.
Well, I ain't trying to hear that lesson.
Because one thing I know, one thing I know is that the truth can always be questioned.
Yeah! That's how I'm living.
When you're lying, you got no answers.
You got handclappers and a whole lot of dancers, in the church of sanctuary.
They all forgot Jesus was a revolutionary; they all forgot Jesus was a revolutionary!
They hung out with criminals.
I would say read the bible; but it's not the original. So it is really misleading.
If you don't know the history of the author, you don't know what you are reading; if you you don't know the history of the author, you don't know what you've read.
You can't taste the nectar.
That answers the question on why I do lectures: because while every MC claims to be the teacher, I be dissin' professors.
Keep that bible on the shelf.

God helps those who help themselves.
Stop reading from a dead book; stop reading from a dead book for a live god! You know how stupid you look?
God reads the bible with you.
You both read the language of the devil is dissin' you.
What can the next man do with a bible in his hand that you yourself can't do?...
Burning candles don't get you down with universal truth.
So why you dressed on Easter and worship a false Mary that looks like Mona Lisa--Damn you lost.
On Christ's mass what's the purpose of Santa Claus; on Christmas what's the purpose of Santa Claus!!
I'm not synthetic; I'm not anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, Moslem or anti-Semetic.
But I will set it off in the temple; because the real holy place is mental. The real holy place is mental!!
("mental=physical...metaphysical" in soft voice)

2. 'Fight the Power", by Public Enemy

1989, a number, another summer
sound of the funky drummer.
Music to hit you hard, cos' I know you got soul.
Listen, if you missin' y' all.
swinging while I'm singin'
given whatcha' gettin'
know what I'm knowin, while the Black man's sweatin
in the rhythm I'm rollin'
gotta give us what we want
gotta give us what we need
Our freedom of speech is the freedom of death
We got to fight the powers that be
'Fight the power [chorus]
As the rhythm. . . is designed. . . to fill your mind
Now that you realize the prize alive
we've got to poke the stuff, to make you tough
From the heart it's a start, a work of art.
To make change from the chains.
People, people: we're all the same. No! We're not all the same.
Cos' we don't know the game. What we need is awareness.
We can't get careless.
You say what is this?
Our beloved lets get down to business.

Make ourselves the face of fitness.
Bum rush the show!
You got to tell them what you know'
to make everybody see in order to fight the power that be. [chorus]
Elvis was a hero to most
but he never meant shit to me
as he's a straight out racist
The sucker was simple and plain. . .
Motherfuck him and John Wayne!
Cos' I'm Black and I'm proud
I'm ready , I'm hyped
Cos' I'm amped"
Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamp.
'Don't worry, be happy' was a number one jam
Damn, if I say it you can slap me right here
Let's get this party started right...get it!
Right on. Ca' mon. What we got to say is power to the people, no delay.
Make everybody see in order to fight the powers that be
[chorus] END.

3. "An Interlude", by Public Enemy

One minute worth of shit.
Yo! This is it.
I want to talk about us: disgusted at the Uncle Tom droppin' bombs in the hood. Sellout niggaz selling drugs.
And how can you love livin' in the projects?
Gettin' checks and givin' it back to the government.
Bust your ass to pay the rent.
And let's look at that word project: just another word for experiment.
One side of the street is a church; across the road is a liquor store.
Both of them keeping us down, keeping us poor.
My hood ain't the center of town.
And the joints filled back to back with Black.
Forward brothers who did something but did not think.
And in the colleges for Black thinking, they ain't doin' a damn thing collectively.
The negro: where the fuck does he go!!!??
Cos' right here is apartheid: he can run, but he can't hide!

4. "Wake up(reprise in the sunshine)", by Brand Nubians

Let's get down in the sunshine;
everybody loves the sunshine [chorus]
Knowledge this:
.. . . in need. . .god Islam as I proceed to civilize the uncivilized,
word of wisdom to the crew from the wise.
[background] Speak on it, y'all.
I guess I'm like the verbalizer for the fact I'm moving blackward.
This Asiatic Blackman is a dog spelt backward.
The maker, the owner, the cream of the planet earth, father of
civilization, god of the universe.
Manifest thoughts with my infinite styles, making sure this travels
23 million miles. . . to upset the crucifix
Because the heart of the problem is this:
the preacher got me putting money in the pan for the rest of the
week, so now I'm living out of a soup can.
He has a home, drives a caddy to town;
has the whole earth believing he's coming up from the ground. . .
A drug-controlled substance contained in a vial.
Set up by the devil as he looks and he smiles.
Good at the game of tricknology.
But I have knowledge of my self, you're not fooling me.
You see, the answer to me is Black unity; unification to help our bad
situation.
I wrote this on the day I was in power, all being born of my self. . .
Now our babies are born believe this is the way of us.
That's the way the devil wants it so it is no fuss.
It's just that sad old song self-destruction to stop our reproduction. . .
But we need knowledge, wisdom to bring forth the understanding.
Culture. Freedom. [murderer]
Powerfyment. [murderer]. . .
Can a devil fool us'?
No, not nowadays bro'.
You mean to say the devil fooled us 4 hundred years ago?. . .
It's time now to drop the bomb and make the devil pay the piper
True indeed. True indeed. [chorus]
The solution: knowledge is self, to better our self because I know
myself that we can live much better than this.
Nothing has changed; it's just another sequel.
The devil is still causing trouble among the righteous people.
drugs in our community-that ain't right [chorus]
can't even get a job-that aint right.
poisoning our babies-that ain't right.
lying who is god-that ain't right.

Well here's some food for thought: many fought for the sport and the Black man still comes up short?
It is time to motivate, build and elevate.
Blind, deaf, and dumb, we got to change that mindstate.
So I dip, dip diver, civilize an 85er. Got to let 'em know the devil's a conniver.
This is the plan from the brotherman from the motherland:
now it is time to take a stand.
I'll keep striving to do my duty to awake them to the universal family.
I say asalma lakam.
Move on Black man. Move on [chorus].

5. "U.N.I.T.Y", by Queen Latifah

Who you calling 'bitch'
Ya' gotta them know
U.N.I.T.Y. [chorus]
You ain't a bitch or a ho' [chorus]

Instinct leads me to another flow
everytime I hear a brother call a girl a bitch or 'ho'.
Trying to make a sister to feel low.
Ya know know all that's got to go.
Now everybody knows there's exceptions to this rule:
I won't be gettin' mad when we playing it cool.
But don't you be calling me out my name,
I'll bring wrath to those who disrespect me like a dame.
That's why I'm talkin'
One day I was walkin down the block.
I had my cutoff shorts on cos' it was crazy hot.
I walked by these dudes and when they passed me,
one of them felt my boobies he was nasty.
I turned around, somebody was catching a wrath.
Then the little one said, "yeah, me bitch" and laughed.
Cos' he was with his boys he tried to break fly.
I punched him dead in the eye, and said who you calling "bitch"?
Unity [chorus]

Appendix Two

Preliminary Questionnaire

Name: __________________________________.
Grade:_______
Male _____. Female______

1. Does music in general play a big part in your everyday life?
Yes, a lot.______. Some______. A little______. Not at all______

2. How much time do you spend each day listening to music and/or watching music videos?
Never____ Less than 1 hr._____. From 1-2 hrs___ More than 2 hrs.

3. Do you like rap music?
Yes, a lot_____ Some______ A little_____ Not at all______

4. Please indicate the kind of rap you like? (for eg. hard core, dance, message, all kinds, etc). ____.

5. How often do you get into other aspects of the rap scene?(for eg. wearing rap fashion, talking the "talk, attending dances/concerts).
Always___ Very often____ Sometimes____ A little_____ Never____

6. What is the most important part of a song for you?
Sound/overall beat_____ Lyrics/message______ Both_____

7. Please write down your favourite rap bands. Try for at least five.
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
More:

8. Please write down your favourite rap songs. Try for at least five.
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
More:

9. On the space provided below, try to explain what you think the meaning or message is of three of your favourite songs. If you don't or can't think of one, just say so. Take as much space as you need. Please indicate song title and artist for each.

Song 1:

Song 2:

Song 3:

Would you be willing to participate in an interview? Yes____ No____
If yes, please provide your telephone number so we may arrange a time and place for future interview. Tel no.: __________________.

Thank you very much for participating in this questionnaire.

Appendix Three

General Structured Questions

I started every interview with the following planned prompts:

1. What comes to mind when you think of the word: 'success', 'school', 'money', 'the future'?

Then for each song played during the interview the following questions were asked:

2. Who was that?
3. How would you classify that song in terms of dance, hard core, political, etc.?
4. How often do you listen to this type of rap?
5. How often do you listen to this particular artist?
6. Do you listen to this type of rap alone, in a group or both?
7. What was the tone or mood of the song?
8. What mood are you usually in when you play this kind of rap?
9. How much of this song did you understand?
10. What was the song about?
11. Do you agree with the song's message-why or why not?

12a. Do you think songs like this have an impact on how people see things?

12b. How about with you, personally?

13. Do you think songs like this help or hurt the Black situation? How so?
14. This song has a lot of swearing in it. What do you think about the issue. of profanity in rap? (same question was asked regarding the issues of violence, treatment of women, drugs and use of the term 'nigger' in rap since all the songs make reference to these themes).

The following auxiliary questions were asked during our discussion of KRS-1's song, "The Real Holy Place" and Public Enemy's, "Interlude".

15. In another song on this tape, KRS-1 says something about 'capitalism being a system of pimps and 'hos'. Any ideas what he means by this?
16. What do you think about the way the system is?

17. Public Enemy(PE) has another very controversial song called 'Fight the Power'. Are you familiar with it?
18. Who are these "powers'?
19. Does PE say how to fight the power? If so, how?
20. Why does PE want you to fight the power?
21. Do you share their attitude? If so, how would or do you fight the power?
22. Does rap help fight the power?